

Revolutionary Regroupment



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CWI/Socialist Alternative: centrists for Bernie Sanders

No support to capitalist candidates, for a workers' party in the U.S.

By Icaro Kaleb, originally published in Portuguese in August 2016



Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative's main spokesperson, with Democrat Bernie Sanders (photo: Progressives Today)

[This article started being written when the primaries were still going on. Therefore it does not take into consideration more recent CWI positions. No repudiation of the positions discussed in this piece has been made, though.]

The 2016 US presidential election primaries are over. The Republican Party chose Donald Trump, a hateful billionaire who was once the presenter of the TV reality-show "The Apprentice". He is not afraid to hide his prejudice against Hispanics and immigrants, Muslims and blacks. On the contrary, these disgusting features are seen as "saying what he means" by a base of reactionary supporters that have built rallies across the country.

Despite the fear of “instability” that his open bigotry, provocative and conspiratorial style cause among some members of the Republican establishment, Trump is ultimately just one more candidate for the big capitalists. If elected, he would have no problem adapting to the interests of US imperialist rulers.

The same can be said of former first lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was nominated by the Democratic Party. Among all candidates during the primaries, Clinton is the one that had more support from Wall Street’s banks and financial institutions, for her record of good services for the American bourgeoisie. She at times tries to show a “human face”, but in reality is a strong supporter of the Obama administration and the maintenance of a system of social injustice and oppression. Obama is always “sorry” for the racist crimes committed by police forces, but no change is ever made; the fear and super exploitation of millions of illegal immigrants continue; the American empire carries on with its operations worldwide, including Syria.

Clinton’s main adversary during the Democratic primaries was Vermont’s senator Bernie Sanders, who certainly represented something different in this dispute. Sanders claims to be a “Socialist” and only received small donations for his campaign. He had enormous support from young people who reject the sexism, racism and homophobia of American society and are critical of the effects of capitalism. Some of Sanders’ constant points against Clinton was his opposition at the time to the Iraq war and his defense of a public healthcare system. His campaign won several states.

This shows that many young people are interested in ideas that escape the typical polarization between liberals/conservatives that usually dominates the American political debate. In a context of huge movements against the racist system following the police murders of black people and due to the understanding that “capitalism is not working” after years of recession, this shows it is possible to build political movements to the left of the mainstream democrats. But can Bernie Sanders’ campaign help building a working class revolutionary party?

We believe that despite some progressive measures that Sanders advocated for – like the raise in the minimum wage to \$15/hour, more taxes on the rich and a public healthcare – his campaign defended the continuation of the social economic system that is an antithesis to this and a roadblock to social equality and the end of oppressions – capitalism. Sanders himself has always made it very clear that his idea of “Socialism” is the model of capitalism of some European countries. Although it is possible, as a result of mass struggles, to achieve some of the reforms he proposed under capitalism, the big

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capitalists would still keep the state and economic power necessary to eventually revert them. This is why one should have no illusions in this kind of political project. It was necessary to warn Sanders' supporters of the dead end of attempts to make the capitalist system rational or "humane".

Also, Sanders was not an independent "progressive". His campaign was for one of the two parties of big capital and he actively sought to recruit people into many non-progressive ideals represented by the Democrats. In spite of having been elected as an independent, Bernie is with the Democrats in most important issues. He did not support the war on Iraq, but has been a consistent supporter of American imperialism action worldwide, from the bombing in Serbia in the late 1990s, to the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the recent operations in Libya and Syria. During the primaries, he declared he would support Hillary Clinton in case she were chosen as party candidate. This support was reinforced after the end of the primaries, what shows his commitment to the Democrat establishment.

Revolutionaries must oppose all capitalist candidates, including those with allegedly "progressive" features like Sanders. As defended by the Communist International led by V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, we believe the working class cannot change its situation as an oppressed class through bourgeois elections. Revolutionaries have an interest in them due to the attention elections usually draw. Our intent is to explain the communist program and expose the falsehood of a "democracy" established on the drastic inequality between exploiters and exploited, which includes campaigning against all capitalist candidates.

It is sometimes even useful to give a "critical vote" to working class candidates that run on an independent platform, with workers' demands and in opposition to the capitalists and their parties, as a way of showing support to such program (as well as exposing the limits of reformist or centrist groups). That was definitely not the case with Sanders. Supporting him meant helping pushing the youth and the workers towards the "graveyard of social movements" that is the Democratic Party. If victorious in the general elections Sanders would not attack the "1%" billionaires and the roots of their power, but only try to "reduce their influence", which is quite a fallacy when they maintain the property of the means of production, the banks, control the state bureaucracy and the police forces etc. There is absolutely nothing about Sanders' campaign that could justify an iota of support from a communist. Revolutionaries should instead have sent a clear message to his supporters: only working class struggles can really produce big changes towards social equality. And definite change can only be achieved through the working class obtaining political power. More than ever, now that the American youth is inclined to more radical ideas, it is necessary to break from the Democratic Party and build a workers' party to fight for their immediate as well as historical interests: a Socialism very different from Sanders'.

Socialist Alternative (SA) is the American section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), an organization that claims adherence to Trotskyism. It was one of Sanders' most enthusiastic supporters during the primaries. They organized a "Movement for Bernie" with the purpose of helping his candidacy and declared that they would support him as an independent if he didn't win the nomination. They also said they're for a party of the "99%" built around Sanders' campaign. SA/CWI has played a shameful role by helping Sanders expand his influence among the youth. Instead of possibly contributing to building a workers' party in the US, the SA supporters are jumping Sanders' bandwagon towards a dead end. While it did it though, SA raised a few "arguments" in an attempt to justify what they were doing.

CWI section in Brazil published a polemical piece in response to criticisms raised against them on the left, in an attempt to maintain its integrity as a revolutionary organization (*Socialists and Bernie Sanders' campaign – a debate with the PSTU*, March 4, 2016). When not indicated otherwise, the quotes in this article were translated to English from that piece.

Sanders and Socialist Alternative

The CWI says there are risks for the left involving Sanders' campaign. One of them is "a non-critical and opportunist position towards Sanders, not criticizing his errors, or even having illusions in the possibility of

turning the Democratic Party to the left”. Later it says that “Socialist Alternative has never hidden its disagreements with Bernie Sanders”. Then there’s a short list of criticisms against him, some of which we ourselves would raise, such as the true meaning of his “Socialism”. According to the CWI, on foreign policy, Sanders “has taken **more complicated and even mistaken positions**” (our emphasis). As we like to call things by their own name, we say Sanders is a supporter of American imperialist crimes.

But is it true that SA “has never hidden its disagreements with Bernie Sanders”? Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative’s elected City Council member in Seattle has been participating in many activities that the “Movement for Bernie” is sponsoring. One of those was a Sanders’ rally in the primaries in the state of Washington. Sawant addressed Sanders in her speech:

“Seattle, are you ready for a political revolution? Are you ready to welcome Bernie Sanders to the first major city that won a \$15 minimum wage?... Last November I got re-elected despite half a million in corporate cash being thrown against us. That’s what Bernie’s campaign is about: Fighting back and throwing out the rulebook of corporate politics.... That is what democratic Socialism is – putting people and the planet over profits! We need a President who fights for working people, for unions, and for immigrants. We do NOT need a President who has taken millions from Wall Street banks! Because as Bernie says, Congress does not regulate Wall Street. Wall Street controls the Congress. Big corporations fund and control these political parties. I agree with Bernie, we need to think big and outside the box.... I want to feel the Bern through November, how about you? We need to build a revolution that can really take our country out of the hands of billionaires and into the hands of working people.”
– *Video: Socialist Kshama Sawant speaks at Bernie Sanders’ mass rally. March 27, 2016.*
<http://www.Socialistalternative.org/2016/03/27/video-Socialist-kshama-sawant-speaks-bernie-sanders-mass-rally/>

In this speech, as in many of their enthusiastic statements in support of Sanders, Sawant and the “Movement for Bernie” did not dare to raise the flimsiest criticism against him. It is impossible to find one line in this speech that is critical of Sanders. On the contrary, SA is attempting to blend the idea of “a revolution that can really take our country out of the hands of billionaires” and his candidacy, which obviously did not represent that. Moments such as this, in which Sawant had the attention of nearly twenty thousand people in Seattle would be perfect for her to discuss the falsehood of Sanders’ “Socialism” and his veiled support to the Obama administration, his support of the imperialist interventions overseas and his promise to collaborate with Hillary Clinton if she won the primaries. Where did all these criticisms go? With these characteristics, can Bernie really be a president “who fights for working people”?

The CWI claim that they do not hide their criticisms while supporting Sanders is a sheer lie, a weak argument to cover their blatant capitulation to Sanders. SA can at times make very soft criticisms of Sanders in articles of more limited circulation, like the article we are discussing. But in all their public statements, mass speeches and leaflets, these criticisms disappear into thin air.

Sanders and the need of a workers’ party in the US

The CWI’s article says that “Socialist Alternative has since the beginning clearly stated its position: we defend building a new workers’ party, a party to defend the 99%”. But there is a contradiction here, since at the same time SA was supporting a candidate of the Democratic Party, a party of the imperialist bourgeoisie (the “1%” if you will). SA suggested that Sanders broke with the Democrats and launched a campaign for an independent political party. But they also stated their support for him if he continued running for the Democrats or if he ran for the Green Party, which is also not a working class party and attracts part of the voters who are dissatisfied with the two big parties:

“We must recognize the risks with Sanders’ campaign. Socialist Alternative has since the beginning defended that Sanders should have run as an independent to avoid creating illusions in the Democrats, which is a party of

the ruling class in America. An independent Sanders campaign, or if he ran for a radical small formation, like the Green Party, would be an important step to building a workers' alternative. But facing the accomplished fact, Socialists had to take a position. Socialist Alternative's position was that Sanders' campaign would attract big support, specially from the youth, in which a majority prefers 'Socialism' to 'capitalism' while of course still carrying a big confusion about what 'Socialism' means".

But despite recognizing the contradiction in defending a workers' party while for months supporting a candidate of a bourgeois party, the CWI had no problem with it since Sanders attracted "big support". One cannot seriously advocate a "Break with the Two Parties of Big Business" while campaigning for a Democrat. But even if this was not the case, the party Sanders decided to run for would not change the nature of his pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist, dubious "Socialism". That Socialist Alternative was willing to support him even when he opted for the Democrats is a striking display of opportunism. SA is now supporting Green Party's candidate Jill Stein while continues to put pressure on Sanders to run as an independent and start building a "party for the 99%":

"That's why Socialist Alternative is calling on Bernie to continue running through November as an independent if he is blocked in the rigged primary process. Win or lose in the general election, an independent Sanders campaign could win millions of votes and lay the foundations for a new party of the 99%.

"On the other hand, if despite all their dirty tricks against him, Sanders remains loyal to the Democratic Party and backs Clinton in the general election, it would mean the demoralization and disorganization of our movement."

[...]

"There is still time for Sanders to run as an independent or to appeal to Jill Stein and the Green Party to join their ticket. While the Greens have generally remained aloof from Sanders' campaign, Stein has repeatedly indicated that she is open to collaborating with Bernie if breaks from the Democrats."

— **Time to launch a new Party for the 99%. April 28, 2016**
<http://www.socialistalternative.org/2016/04/28/time-bernie-launch-party-99/>

(As a side comment, even the Green Party candidate, who isn't a Marxist, had more principles than SA on this issue and conditioned her collaboration with Sanders to a previous break from the Democrats).

The CWI is calling Sanders to launch a "party for the 99%". Trotskyists usually call for building a powerful working class party to oppose the parties of the ruling class. But we want such party to fight for socialist revolution, not just improvements for workers within capitalism. If there was a movement for the creation of a workers' party, Trotskyists would participate with their own program against all sorts of reformist or centrist currents. This was well explained by Trotsky on his discussions about a labor party in America in the 1930s:

"It would be absurd to say that we advocate a reformist party. We can say to the leaders of the LNPL [Labor's Non-Partisan League, political movement associated with the CIO]: 'You're making of this movement a purely opportunistic appendage to the Democrats.' It's a question of a pedagogical approach. How can we say that we advocate the creation of a reformist party? We say, you cannot impose your will through a reformist party but only through a revolutionary party. The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party but we have our program, we make of this a revolutionary..."

"I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP [American section of the Fourth International]. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to create a big workers' party. I will help you but I propose that you consider a program for this party. I make such and such propositions. I begin with this. Under these conditions it would be a big step forward. Why not say openly what is? Without any camouflage, without any diplomacy....
— **Leon Trotsky, On the Labor Party Question in the United States. April-June 1938.**
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/04/lp.htm>

When it calls for a party of the “99%” on the basis of Sanders’ campaign, Socialist Alternative is giving authority to his program, instead of clearly saying that it cannot help the working class. The SA is so blindly following Sanders that they say that his support for Clinton would mean “the demoralization and disorganization of our movement”. Revolutionaries should have told workers from the beginning that they should not count on Sanders to build a party that defended their interests, That his program most definitely is not a good program for them.

Sanders’ perspective is not simply “limited” or eventually “mistaken”: it is a bourgeois “reformist” campaign which does not threaten the power of the capitalist class or American imperialism. A party built on the basis of his campaign would not be a step forward in the struggle for a workers’ party, but a detour. A party for the “99%” built around Sanders most probably would not even speak on behalf of the working class. But even if it did (which is highly unlikely), SA would from the beginning help the consolidation of his deceptive bourgeois program.

Is there anything “new” about Bernie Sanders?

The following excerpts from the CWI article are illustrative of its collection of errors and contradictions. CWI’s politics is a combination of deluded expectations on Sanders and cynicism to pretend not seeing his treacherous positions:

“The big support for Sanders points to a new situation. There’s a deep distrust of the powerful elite in the US since the economic crisis and the weak recovery that increased the income of the rich. The position of the PSTU [Brazilian Morenoites] and of others on the left is that nothing has changed. Sanders would be just one more among other leaders on the left of the Democrats as we have seen before, who will ‘clearly go from the left to the right’ and will be domesticated as previous left candidates.

“Historical lessons are important, but they do not replace a concrete analysis of the situation. If we adopt a position that history will always repeat itself, we have the risk of revolutionaries becoming conservatives....

“Why would Sanders be different? Because the situation is different. The support for capitalism is in crisis and Sanders can call himself a ‘Socialist’ and defend a ‘political revolution’ and that is attractive, not an obstacle to get supporters, especially among the youth....

“The Democratic Party leadership is getting nervous with Sanders candidacy. When he started his campaign, Clinton was light-years ahead. His candidacy was not seen as a problem, quite on the contrary, it would help mobilizing for the primaries and in the end he would support the candidate of the majority, as he always did. In fact, from the beginning he declared he would support Clinton if he lost in the primaries....

“The fact is that now he is seen as a real threat and has high popularity among the general population.... This contradiction will grow for Sanders’ supporters. It will be clearer and clearer that his victory is only possible against the party apparatus, which is part of the same structure that he criticizes. An important layer will not accept supporting Hillary Clinton and will be open to breaking with the party, even in Sanders supports Clinton.”

The CWI is saying that the support Sanders is receiving reflects a “new situation” because he talks about “Socialism” and “political revolution” and such terms actually attract people. But precisely because these words are now attractive, revolutionaries should clarify the misconception spread by Sanders about their meaning. Despite using new vocabulary, there is nothing “new” about Sanders’ actual content that would prevent his collaboration with the Democrats. The CWI itself recognizes that Sanders “declared he would support Clinton if he lost in the primaries”. So is he really a “threat” to the Democratic establishment? Doesn’t this single fact show that he actually *is* the kind of candidate “who will ‘clearly go from the left to the right’ and will be domesticated as previous left candidates”? This seems quite evident, but the CWI assures us that “the situation is different”. Isn’t this replacing blind expectations for “a concrete analysis of the situation”?

Finally, the CWI says that a large group of Sanders' supporters will not accept Clinton even if he does. This is certainly the case, but then shouldn't revolutionaries denounce Sanders' will to adapt to the party apparatus and to the "Wall Street candidate", Hillary Clinton? This would help many of his supporters realize that Sanders is not so consistent when he says he is against the "billionaire class" and the establishment. Making this denunciation beforehand would give authority to revolutionists, but as we saw, this has nothing to do with the CWI's policy.

There is certainly something "new" about Sanders to many young people who have not had any experience with candidates that criticize the harsh effects of capitalism in American politics. But for Marxists, his rhetoric full of contradictions and his capitalist "Socialism" are nothing to be impressed about. Revolutionaries should be warning workers about the true meaning of the Sanders campaign. Instead, SA is reinforcing their wrong ideas and impressions by saying that Sanders is indeed "unprecedented". One of CWI's favorite arguments is implying that all those who don't follow their capitulation are sectarians:

"Some groups on the far left have done nothing but denounce Sanders without realizing the opportunities inherent in the situation, with millions of newly radicalizing young people and workers."
– **Sanders and the left: what is the role of Socialists?**. March 1st, 2016.
<http://www.socialistalternative.org/2016/03/01/sanders-left-role-Socialists/>

In the article published by their Brazilian section it is stated that: *"Simply condemning Sanders' supporters for helping the 'enemy' would close any possibilities of dialogue with thousands of radicalized young people who are willing to discuss what is Socialism and how to get there"*.

Such a straw man is very easy to attack. Sanders' supporters should obviously not be treated as "enemies". Communists of course have an interest in discussing politics with people who got involved because of his criticisms to the "billionaire class" and Wall Street. But this should not mean being silent about his capitalist core, his opportunist positions and his commitment to the Democratic Party. We don't need to follow their wrong ideas about Sanders in order to dialogue with them. In fact, these criticisms should be done to convince these supporters of the need for socialist revolution and Sanders' inability to defend this program.

We would hope these supporters changed their mind about Sanders, but even if they didn't, we would explain our reasons and then expect them to eventually realize the correctness of the Marxist position. Pointing to Sanders' promise to support Clinton would reinforce our argument, for example. All this would have the intention of helping Sanders' progressive supporters to break from his campaign. If the SA is afraid of holding an unpopular position, they will certainly never build a revolutionary party, but maybe a party that is always willing to follow whatever popular bourgeois movement that appears. This is being the rearguard of the working class, not its vanguard.

At no moment the CWI tried to win over these supporters away from Sanders, since this would demand saying what his campaign really meant. "To be with the masses" (as the CWI article advocates) is correct when it means participating in the struggles of the workers and the oppressed, pointing to the need of a revolutionary party to get the hell out of capitalism. But "To be with the masses" can very easily acquire an opportunist content when it is used to justify accepting the reactionary or reformist ideas existent among the workers. The supporters' good intentions could not have changed the political content of the movement – in this case, Sanders' campaign. This contradiction could only be resolved by their breaking away from his confusing set of politics. The CWI did all it could to prevent, instead of helping this process.

CWI, the "new formations" and the socialist revolution

This position on Sanders is not a lightning in a blue sky, but rather a good illustration of the CWI's approach to the "Neo-reformist" social movements in recent years.

“There is an international process going on these days, to rebuild political instruments of the working class, replacing those we lost after the fall of Stalinism in the early 1990s, including the PT [Brazilian Workers’ Party]. Neoliberalism has lost the drive it had in the 1990s, when it dominated the political scenario. Rebuilding the left has been complicated and tortuous. New parties emerged, like the German Die Linke, the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, Syriza in Greece, *Podemos* in Spain and even the PSOL in Brazil. This process involved leaders like Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales. All these phenomena express the pursuit of a new radical left, but they also bring many elements of mistakes from the old left: reformism with changes only within the system, electoral opportunism (downgrading the program, making alliances with bourgeois parties etc.), hesitation in the decisive moments of working class mobilization, which does not lead to breaking out of the system. It is a process full of conflicts and contradictions... We have to understand these phenomena as part of a process, a struggle between living forces.”

There is definitely something wrong with this definition of bourgeois or sometimes reformist leaders and parties as “political instruments of the working class” and the parties that “we lost” (?) with the fall of Stalinism. Sure these parties had mass influence among the workers in some cases, but they were also counterrevolutionary agencies within their movement. The “new formations” are not different. Despite Chávez’s nationalization of some industries (which revolutionists defend and would seek to broaden) and some conflicts with American imperialism, he always did his best to prevent any threat to the capitalist system and the emergence of an independent proletarian movement. On a much smaller scale, the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda and the Brazilian PSOL have always formed alliances with elements of the ruling class. The CWI’s own experience within these parties is a confirmation of this, since they recognize their “reformism with changes only within the system, electoral opportunism..., hesitation in the decisive moments of working class mobilization”.

The problem is that the CWI insists on presenting these phenomena as progressive. Certainly all of them involve sectors of the working class questioning the capitalist system. But this does not mean that their gathering around bourgeois or reformist parties or movements is progressive. Quite on the contrary, it is a detour that prevents their further radicalization towards revolutionary conclusions, just like the Sanders movement is doing with the American progressive youth. This is a fundamental distinction that the CWI is failing to make.

It is certainly true that all these political processes involve “conflicts and contradictions” in a “struggle between living forces”. But if we think about it for a minute, what is the CWI’s role in this conflict? Certainly not the role of exposing the betrayals and opportunism of these leaders and parties as a way of helping the workers break from their politics; instead, the CWI position in this struggle is to be considerably silent (or at least not very vocal) about these leaderships’ nature while they support the masses’ illusions about them. By doing this, the CWI is actually helping the reformists and demagogues in containing the workers. About the Syriza in Greece, the CWI states that:

“... The party was seen as an instrument for a political solution and won the 2015 elections. Its leader, Tsipras, could have been pushed to go beyond what he planned, and with the July referendum, he opened the opportunity that the Greek people wanted to fightback the ruling class of Europe, with a huge victory of the ‘No’ to the agreement that would impose yet another austerity package. Facing the task and the having a historical popular mandate from the people, Tsipras backed down. It was a battle and an important defeat for the working class, which will bring important lessons, just like the defeat of the first Russian Revolution of 1905-06.”

Except that Tsipras could not have been “pushed to go beyond” because he was ahead of a bourgeois coalition government. Syriza’s entire trajectory, connections and positions indicated it could not transcend the bourgeois state. This is what revolutionaries said at the time while the CWI was nurturing expectations about Tsipras. The statement that the Russian revolution of 1905 taught many lessons is true, but apparently not to the CWI. According to one of the most important interpreters of such revolution (Trotsky), it showed that the bourgeoisie was not willing to make even serious democratic reforms, much less a revolution of any sort. Only the proletariat could be expected to fight for a real transformation of the country. When the CWI says that Tsipras, Sanders,

Chávez etc. could have somehow been “pushed” to achieve important measures for the working class, it is ignoring the lessons of 1905, 1917 and of all subsequent revolutions. Instead of expecting to “push” the demagogues of the bourgeoisie to the left, it is necessary to create alternatives to them. And this can only be done by broadly denouncing their intentions and their opportunism.

In all cases where some reformist or bourgeois tendency or leader arose and drew support from the working class, it was certainly necessary to dialogue with the workers that believed they represented an alternative. This means listening to them, pointing out their errors, predicting the trajectory of their movement. All this would have the intention of facilitating the drawing of revolutionary conclusions. Simply “supporting” the “political instruments” only helps taming the workers rage against capitalist injustice into a dead end.

CWI’s gravest assertion is that *“Lenin and Trotsky’s position in the Russian Revolution was much more sophisticated and full of nuances and led to the growth of the Bolshevik Party from eight thousand members in February to more than two hundred thousand in October”*. This is stated when the CWI was criticizing “sectarians” on the left who did not support Sanders. What is implied here is that the leaders of the October revolution were mild in their denunciation of the bourgeois demagogues and the reformists that supported them. This could not be further from the truth, since the Bolsheviks had the most inflexible opposition to them. This is what Lenin had to say when he arrived in Russia about the Provisional Government that made so many promises and even some democratic reforms:

“No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations. Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding ‘demand’ that this government, a government of capitalists, should cease to be an imperialist government.

“Recognition of the fact that in most of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies our Party is in a minority, so far a small minority, as against a bloc of all the petty-bourgeois opportunist elements, from the Popular Socialists and the Socialist-Revolutionaries down to the Organising Committee (Chkheidze, Tsereteli, etc.), Steklov etc. etc., who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread that influence among the proletariat.”

– **Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution* [The April Theses]. April 4, 1917.**

The growth of the Bolsheviks was based upon the fact that all their main predictions and warnings to the working class about this government (in which so many workers and “Socialists” put their trust) were confirmed. It had nothing to do with the opportunist “nuance” that the CWI is talking about, which means not openly criticizing, but instead give support to the parties and leaders that collaborate with the bourgeoisie, as well as believe they can be “pushed” to the left.

What would the CWI have done in 1917 if we consider its current methodology? There were plenty of people, including within the Bolshevik Party who wanted to “deepen the democratic revolution” by “critically supporting” the bourgeois Provisional Government. Lenin and Trotsky conducted a harsh battle against those people because they knew the revolution would be defeated if such position prevailed among the workers. Based on these ideas, the honest supporters of the CWI should reflect about what their organization will do in future revolutions. Their current politics is not good to orient the workers and the oppressed.

Declaration of fraternal relations between Revolutionary Regroupment and O Que Fazer?

Originally published in Portuguese in September 2016



It is based on the understanding of the need to build a revolutionary workers' party, which currently does not exist in Brazil, that Revolutionary Regroupment and the group O Que Fazer? ["What is to be done?"] decide to establish fraternal relations in order to discuss the basis for creating a militant propaganda group and contribute to such task.

O Que Fazer? (OQF) was formed in the state of São Paulo in the second half of 2015 by comrades who split from the Trotskyist Fraction – Fourth International (FT-CI) section in Brazil, then named LER-QI and nowadays MRT (Workers' Revolutionary Movement) and by formerly independent comrades. The criticisms raised by those who left the FT pointed to the empiricist character of the group's political positions, especially the abandonment of the transitional program during the sharpest moments of class struggle, and its substitution for variants of a "democratic" program. Differences also involved criticism of internal bureaucratic maneuvers of the leadership, such as the habit of not recognizing its mistakes, while at the same time subtly assimilating criticisms received – a classic feature of centrism. The whole process of internal dispute demonstrated the complete absence of self-criticism in the MRT leadership, which is a central element to building a revolutionary party and keep moving forward.

Revolutionary Regroupment (RR) had its origins in the state of Rio de Janeiro in 2011, in a split from the Coletivo Lenin (CL), an organization that claimed adherence to the historical programmatic legacy of the Spartacist League (SL) and the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). The SL and the IBT represented an important critical update of the revolutionary program against opportunism on the left in certain historical periods (the SL in the 1960-70s and the IBT between 1982 and mid-2000s). After the frustration of the attempted fusion with the IBT, due to its dishonest and bureaucratic actions and also to the inexperience of the CL, the latter went through a crisis. A majority (which has recently dissolved) kept the group's name and openly stated that the Trotskyist program was no longer valid or necessary, and proposed a complete change of perspective. A minority recognized the degeneration of IBT, but remained willing to defend the program that the CL had

learned from the history of that organization. This minority formed the RR in Brazil by joining forces with a former IBT supporter in the United States (who is no longer part of the group), who had relations with the CL and participated in its internal struggle.

From the first contact, through the reading of mutual publications, the RR and OQF have found important agreements regarding the current Brazilian political context and have since held regular discussions that allowed taking a step forward. The establishment of fraternal relations indicates a desire of our groups to deepen the discussions in order to verify further points of agreement and resolve remaining differences with the prospect of a fusion in the future. Some important common political positions have been achieved through these discussions, in some cases involving minor corrections on the lines of the two organizations. The points of agreement include:

1 – The understanding that Brazil is currently experiencing a period of growth of the bourgeoisie’s organized offensive against the working class, which needs to defend itself against the various forms of attacks that are being unleashed against us. It was necessary, as part of that defense, to oppose the impeachment suffered by President Dilma Rousseff (PT, Workers Party). This did not mean any kind of political support to Rousseff’s government nor to her allies. Revolutionaries opposed the impeachment (which meant an institutional coup by the way it occurred) with its own transitional program, exposing the crimes and betrayals of the PT and its satellites. We criticize those organizations on the Brazilian left such as the PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party, the Morenoite Brazilian section of the LIT-CI) and the CST (Socialist Workers’ Current, the Brazilian section of the UIT-CI), which did not consider the removal of the former president as part a reactionary movement and did not oppose it. We also criticize those who made political agreements with then-governmental forces, going far beyond the practical cooperation for the purpose of fighting the impeachment. This was the case of most tendencies of the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party, a multi-tendency formation), which joined forces with the PT and the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil, a former Maoist split from the Brazilian CP) in the “Fearless People’s Front” and had an uncritical attitude towards the latter. As well as the PCO (Workers’ Cause Party, which claims adherence to Trotskyism), which became an auxiliary pawn of the PT, completely diving into the class collaboration politics of their bloc. We neither share the position of those who have abandoned the Transitional Program to adopt some variant of a bourgeois-democratic program, such as the call for “General Elections” (as did the PSTU and the MES, Socialist Left Movement, part of the PSOL) or for a “Constituent Assembly” (as did both the MRT and the Marxist Left, Brazilian section of the IMT) as supposed “solutions” to the political crisis.

There was some fine tuning in the political positions of both the RR and OQF regarding this question: **(a)** Despite having opposed the impeachment from the beginning, initially the RR had not characterized this process as a coup, considering that it was distinct from the process experienced in 1964, which installed a military dictatorship in the country. Subsequently, the RR acknowledged that the way the impeachment occurred was a kind of coup by institutional means, that led to a removal of government out of what is envisioned by the Constitution and which strengthened institutions such as the Federal Police, the Public Attorney’s Office and the Judiciary power, although it did not lead to the complete destruction of the bourgeois-democratic regime, nor was accompanied by the same degree of violence as in 1964. **(b)** OQF had originally raised the demand for a “Constituent Assembly to exclude the [bourgeois] parties and elements engaged in this corrupt order”. Subsequently, it decided to abandon this formulation for understanding that, although the intention was to defend a workers government (differently from the slogan for a capitalist Constituent Assembly raised by the MRT/FT as a supposed solution to the crisis), the use of the term could lead to confusion. Therefore, OQF concluded that the perspective of a “general workers’ assembly” or of a “workers’ revolutionary government” against all bourgeois elements, was a more appropriate formulation.

2 – The understanding that revolutionaries must unconditionally defend the oppressed nations attacked by the imperialists or which are under the threat of imperialist strikes. The struggle for a transitional program and for the construction of Trotskyist parties in such countries (which in recent years include Libya, Syria, Iraq, Mali etc.) must be complemented with their defense against imperialism. In some cases, this involves giving tactical

military support to a sector of the oppressed nation (even if it is bourgeois) that is fighting against the imperialist forces, but without any endorsement of their politics, maintaining a programmatic combat against these bourgeois sectors. In the case of the 2011 imperialist intervention in Libya, for example, we believe that revolutionaries should have militarily sided with dictator Muammar Gaddafi while his government was fighting the bloc of French, British and American imperialism and the native bourgeoisie's "National Transitional Council" (after it definitely formed a bloc for power with the imperialists). We criticize the positions on the left of those who saw the struggle of the "rebel" armies, led by reactionary and pro-imperialists forces, as a "revolution" (as did the PSTU/LIT-CI) or who considered that such rebels had a "progressive" character (as did the MRT/FT) and did not took a position of solid defense of the oppressed nation by not siding with those fighting imperialism.

3 – The understanding of the reactionary meaning of the restoration of capitalism by counterrevolutions in the former Deformed / Degenerated Workers' States of Eastern Europe (1989-90) and the Soviet Union (1991). All these regimes needed socialist proletarian revolutions against the ruling bureaucracies (that is, political revolutions), in order to (re)establish the workers' democratic control over the means of production, the state and the armed forces. At the same time, Trotskyists should have defended the social gains that had been obtained from the collapse of capitalism, since the victory of a counterrevolution would have meant heavy burdens on the working class. This became clear with the capitalist restorations that occurred between 1989-91.

In the post-war period, the revolutions that defeated capitalism in Eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba did not build internationalist proletarian democracies, but regimes similar to that of the USSR. We are in agreement that Cuba and North Korea remain bureaucratically Deformed Workers' States, despite the considerable capitalist penetration that the ruling bureaucracies have allowed in recent years. Regarding these countries, we maintain the Trotskyist program of revolutionary defense in the face of possible internal and external counterrevolutions, while at the same time pointing out the need of a proletarian political revolution that oust the power of the bureaucracy and establish a proletarian democracy based on self-government bodies (*soviets*).

Those on the left who claim that capitalism was restored in Cuba and North Korea due to the bureaucracy's reforms (as does the PSTU/LIT-CI regarding these and other cases) fail to explain how the non-capitalist states that existed there were supposedly destroyed and how / when the bourgeoisie built their own states. Other groups, such as the MRT/FT, agree with our position regarding Cuba and North Korea, but do not make a coherent characterization about China, where they say that capitalism "has not been fully restored", but at the same time claim that the Chinese state is a "bourgeois state in construction" or even a state of "transition between deformed workers' state and capitalist state" (?).

While recognizing that large portions of the Chinese economy have been privatized through the endorsement of their bureaucratic leaders, the RR sustains that the Chinese state remains a Deformed Workers' State. The privatization measures produced great damage and put in serious risk the (bureaucratically) planned character of the Chinese economy and also create wider openings that increase the chances for the victory of a capitalist counterrevolution – but such counterrevolution has not yet occurred. OQF still has doubts about China's character in the current scenario. This will be subject of more detailed discussions between the two groups. Some other issues to be discussed in the future also include the positions on the concrete processes that led to the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet bloc and the current characterization of states like Vietnam and Laos, about which we still have doubts due to the limited information available.

4 – The understanding of the treacherous role played in bourgeois elections and also in power by the class-collaboration coalitions between workers' or left-wing organizations and representatives of the bourgeoisie (the so-called "popular fronts"), which the PT has conducted since 1989, for example. Revolutionaries have no place in such coalitions nor give them any support (not even a "critical"). Regarding this matter, it is necessary to swim against the current of much of the Brazilian left, which in the 2016 municipal elections (for Mayor and City Council Members), for instance, is participating in various slates that have "minor" bourgeois parties in it. This is especially the case of the PSOL internal currents and the Brazilian CP (PCB). In the past, the PSTU/LIT-

CI has also been part of various coalitions of this kind, notably with the PSOL, in slates which received financing from big business or even had the participation of parties involved in the administration of the bourgeois state, such as the PCdoB in the Northern city of Belém, in 2012, when the PCdoB was part of Rouseff's government.

5 – The understanding of the fact that members of professional repressive apparatuses are not proletarians, although they may come from the ranks of the working class. We agree with Trotsky's comment that *"The fact that the police officers have been recruited largely from the Social Democratic workers does not mean anything. Here also the existence determines consciousness. The worker who becomes a policeman at the service of the capitalist state is a bourgeois cop, not a worker"* (Revolution and counterrevolution in Germany, 1932). We reject, therefore, the presence of cops in the labor movement and we do not support cops' movements for "better working conditions" and salary raises, which mean better conditions to suppress the struggle of the working class and of the poor. We are for the dissolution of all types of violent forces of the ruling class.

6 – The understanding of the paramount importance for revolutionaries to struggle against all forms of social oppression, including those that have no direct relation with the dynamics of labor exploitation. The fight against racism and sexism, in particular, is strategic to winning the most exploited and oppressed sectors of the proletariat for the program of socialist revolution. The struggle against homophobia also acquires great importance in Brazil's current national political moment, in which so many icons of bourgeois reaction rest on religious pillars and try to scapegoat the LGBT population and blame it for the moral corruption of decaying capitalism. We defend equal social and political rights for all these groups and the end of economic and wage inequalities to which they are submitted; we denounce all forms of violence (institutional or individual) suffered by them and we believe that only through the victory of a socialist revolution a significant first step can be made towards the ultimate end of these forms of oppression, from which capitalism benefits. We also support the national rights of indigenous peoples, which in Brazil suffer with all kinds of prejudices and persecutions.

7 – We defend the agrarian reform for seeing it as a legitimate democratic demand to address a major social problem, especially in semi-colonial countries. However, we understand that within the framework of capitalist exploitation – in which heirs of the colonial exploitation, land grabbers and multinational companies eagerly seek their profits – any proposal of democratic and profound agrarian reform is not feasible. In this scenario, we sustain that a project of agrarian reform can only be carried out under the leadership of urban workers and with the support of the poor peasants, whose ranks must be organized through direct democracy (*soviets*), consolidating a workers' and peasants' government. Such government must impose a program of expropriation and collectivization of the land and of the national and international agribusiness. Also, while the territory of the native oppressed indigenous nations remain object of profit and forests remain a mere locus for gaining huge amounts of money, the struggle for the preservation of the environment will be a utopia. Our natural resources can only be preserved in a new society, in which they are used according to human needs and not to the interests of capital.

These points of agreement will be deepened and expanded through the discussion of other issues. We intend to further discuss, for example, the revolutionary continuity of the Fourth International and make a critical analysis of the role played by the Spartacist League, the IBT and other organizations that resisted the opportunism that dominated the postwar Trotskyist movement. We also intend to discuss a more precise characterization of the current configuration of world imperialism.

Moreover, in the next period we will also initiate organizational discussions to establish how a group located in different cities will function and discuss the priorities and tasks of a small propaganda group. For us, a democratic and healthy internal regime is not a "detail", but an imperative. Without discipline, on the one hand, and full conditions for freedom of internal discussion and political education, on the other, it becomes impossible to correct errors made by the leadership and by the group and therefore politically rearm for the challenges of class struggle. Real democratic centralism is, in conclusion, an absolute necessity for a revolutionary organization.

The establishment of fraternal relations does not mean, as of now, a commitment of each group to defend the exact same political views of the other. But unlike the lack of seriousness of many organizations claiming to be revolutionary, we actively care about the clarity and coherence of ideas for a future fusion. We do not believe that simply mixing or making vague amalgams of positions are ways to meet the objectives we aspire to: making significant steps to contribute to the building of a revolutionary party. We do not intend to rush the process of discussions before there is a strong trust, programmatic and methodological coherence between our groups, expanding what has been achieved so far.

This statement marks a significant moment for the future of both groups. While the reformist and centrist left decays and crumbles before our eyes, revolutionaries must join forces, based on the revolutionary Marxist program updated to our epoch, in order to give steps toward the building of a revolutionary party. There is no “shortcut” for the victory of the workers but the persevering work for its construction. *For the unity of revolutionaries! For the unity of the working class against capital! For the rebirth of the Fourth International!*

O Que Fazer? and Revolutionary Regroupment

Two Statements on Brazil



Unified "Down with Temer" street demo, São Paulo, May 23rd (photo: Brasil 247)

Fight the Impeachment! Fight Dilma's government and its austerity measures!

Originally published in Portuguese in April 2016, as an abridged version of a bigger article from March 23rd (in Portuguese: https://rr4i.milharal.org/2016/03/24/desafios_da_atual_conjuntura). It was written BEFORE President Dilma Rousseff (PT) was removed from office (May 12th).

Dilma deserves to be judged for her crimes against the working class, such as her attacks on labor rights, her complicity with the repression against the workers' movement, the handing over of the country's natural resources to imperialism etc. The same is true about former President Lula. But that can only be achieved through working class struggle to stop and revert government attacks. This Impeachment process is a maneuver of the right-wing oppositional parties PSDB [Brazilian Social-Democracy's Party] and DEM [Democrats], as well as sectors of the PMDB [Brazilian Democratic Movement's Party] (the Vice President's party) to gain full control over the Executive office. They want to profit from Dilma and the PT [Workers' Party] government's complete demoralization and crisis. If Dilma is removed by them, this will not be beneficial to the working class and wouldn't change the succession of attacks unleashed against us. On the contrary, the attacks would be intensified. **Revolutionary Regroupment** says NO to this Impeachment, not due to sympathy towards the PT, but for considering that this process is a smoke screen created by the right-wing opposition in order to benefit from the enormous popular dissatisfaction with Dilma's government, which is to a great extent a product of the attacks the government has conducted against the population, attacks which the proponents of the Impeachment want to deepen.

For a workers united front against the austerity measures!

The central task for the working class in the current situation is the creation of a workers' united front independently from both the right-wing opposition and Dilma's government, capable of uniting several ongoing struggles around the following axis: ***Fight Dilma's "austerity" measures! No cuts to public health and education! No removal of labor rights and no lay-offs! Down with the "Anti-terror" Law, which is an attempt to criminalize the workers' movement and the left! The bosses must pay for their crisis! Fight the right-wing opposition and its Impeachment maneuver!*** Such a united front would mean working class mass action. The left groups and parties that want to take part in it would have complete freedom to express their ideas and criticize each others' political views.

Enough of blocs with government forces!

Many groups on the left, including most internal currents of the **PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party)**, such as **USec's "Insurgência"** and the **CWI section (LSR [Liberty, Socialism and Revolution])**, as well as the **Stalinist PCR [Revolutionary Communist Party]** are taking part in political blocs dominated by pro-government forces, such as the **"Fearless People's Front"**. While claiming to be "For democracy" and against the Impeachment, those blocs include the **PT**, the **PCdoB [Communist Party of Brazil]** and the bureaucratic leaders of **CUT, CTB and UNE** (the trade union federations and the national students' organization that support Dilma's government). They are an obstacle for the creation of an effective united front dedicated to organizing and strengthening the resistance against Dilma and the rest of the bourgeoisie's austerity. On several occasions, the "Fearless People's Front" puts aside any critique of the government and adapts itself to the position of the government forces, such as the PT-led **"Popular Brazil Front"**. At this crucial moment, the last thing the workers need is to be tied to the pro-government forces. We call upon all the militant ranks of these mass organizations to break from such blocs of class collaboration and fight for workers' unity in opposition to all bourgeois forces.

The error of the "Oust Dilma, oust them all!" slogan

Ideally, we are for "ousting them all", in the sense that we want to remove all the representatives of the bourgeoisie from power. But to raise such slogan in the current situation, in which the only concrete possibility of "ousting Dilma" is the consolidation of a right-wing PMDB-PSDB government, won't help workers' interests. To raise such a demand shows indifference towards its concrete results. It of course would be completely different if instead the threat against Dilma came from the working class. The "Oust Dilma, oust them all!" slogan, raised by the **Morenoite PSTU [Socialist Unified Workers' Party] (LIT-CI / WIL-FI)**, by the also **Morenoite CST [Workers' Socialist Current] (PSOL internal tendency and section of UIT-CI / WIU-FI)**, as well as by some **Anarchist groups** does not prioritize defeating Dilma's attacks through the mobilization of the working class, but instead emphasize removing her from power in a moment when the working class won't be able to do it – only the right-wing opposition will. Such position derives from the false logic that Dilma's fall, independently on how it occurs, would give room to a "weaker" government, meaning some kind of victory to the working class. We do not wish to help the right-wing opposition, which is growing stronger and stronger. Dilma's fall by the hands of the right-wing opposition would only give place to a government that would attack us even harder.

No to "general elections" – What we need is a revolutionary workers government!

We also reject demands for new "general elections", which many groups on the left such as the **PSTU (LIT-CI / WIL-FI)** and the **MES (PSOL internal tendency and section of Movimento)** have been raising. From the point of view of the workers' interests, bourgeois elections are a dead-end. As a rule, the bourgeoisie only massively invests in and supports those campaigns that are willing to defend its class interests. The workers don't have a say on matters that really affect their lives: how their workplace should be managed, who should pay for the economic crisis, should labor rights be removed etc. Bourgeois elections are merely a "chance" that the population has to choose their executioners. During periods of low ebb, it is possible to use the elections as a platform to denounce capitalism. But it is not acceptable to rise the demand for "general elections" at the current moment, when what is required is a relentless struggle against the austerity measures. Sometimes those groups

say that the elections they fight for would be different – “controlled by the workers” or some variant of that. But it doesn’t change their confusion. If the working class had enough power to enforce “elections” of this kind on the ruling class, then we could as well build our own government. The **MRT [Workers’ Revolutionary Movement] (Trotskyist Fraction – Left Voice network)** slogan for a “Constituent Assembly convened by the workers” suffers from the same problem [see polemic further in this issue]. The agitation that needs to be done is for a **revolutionary workers’ government** which can meet our social and democratic interests. Although it is not possible to implement such government immediately, we must patiently explain its necessity while fighting to build a broad united front of struggle.

Down with the coup government! Fight Temer’s attacks! No support to the PT or its satellites!

Originally published in Portuguese in June 2016

At the dawn of May 12, Brazil’s President Dilma Rousseff (Workers Party, PT) was temporarily removed from office and will now be judged by the Senate under the authority of the Supreme Court, her conviction being almost certain. The fate of the country is increasingly conducted by the Judiciary’s “robed ministers”, who receive exorbitant incomes and are not accountable to anyone, since they have not even been elected by the population. It is very clear that the articulated action of the Supreme Courts, the Federal Police and the Public Ministry has taken increasingly authoritarian traits. ***This institutional coup must be stopped: we cannot let it be consolidated through the reaffirmation of the Supreme Court and co.’s superpowers!***

The new *de facto* government of Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, PMDB) has already made its intentions very clear: to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis. Surely Rousseff and the PT were already fulfilling the same role. Soon after the 2014 election’s second round, she signed she would rule with the same neoliberal program as Aécio Neves / PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party). Therefore, Revolutionary Regroupment is against the class-colaborationist attempt to turn the mobilizations against Temer into a campaign for the return of Rousseff to power. Due to a number of factors, the PT was not being capable of implementing attacks on the scale and speed required by the big capitalists. Temer and his PSDB and DEM (Democrats) allies immediately started making huge cuts in social programs, the budget for public education and public health, and intend to privatize absolutely everything they can, which may include charging for access to the public health system. It is worth remembering that Rousseff, by proposing and then sanctioning the “Anti-terror” Law, guaranteed legal instruments to massacre any serious attempt of resistance by the workers and the oppressed. ***Faced with this scenario, it is urgent to organize the struggles against Temer’s attacks, but with no support for the PT and its satellites!***

We need a national united front to defeat the attacks!

For several months, while Rousseff was still in office, the PT did all it could to prevent a real popular mobilization against the *impeachment* and that could threaten the austerity measures of its own government. The CUT and the CTB (union federations led by bureaucrats loyal to Rousseff’s government) did not organize any political strike of the working class. The **“Popular Brazil Front”** – built by the PT, PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil) and other pro-Rousseff forces, despite having organized big street demos, did it in a way that prevented any criticism against Rousseff’s austerity measures, restricting them to acritical rallies, many of which were actually musical concerts with pro-PT artists. The **“Fearless People Front”** – led by the MTST (Homeless Workers’ Movement) was integrated by large sectors of the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party); and not only its reformist leadership, the Unidade Socialista, but also groups on its “left bloc” such as USec’s Insurgência and the CWI/LSR. They organized some street demos against the impeachment, while also raising criticisms towards Rousseff’s government. But they quickly became reduced to an appendix of the “Popular Brazil Front”, with the PPF’s leaders putting aside any criticism of the PT during the common activities they organized. There were a

few progressive initiatives like the “**Socialist Left Front**” (in Rio de Janeiro), but it has become a propaganda bloc, consisting of meetings among left groups which revolve around programmatic discussions, instead of mobilizing the working class for struggle against the impeachment and the austerity measures. What is necessary at the present moment is a united front of struggles, capable of uniting the working class and the radical youth around the slogans ***Defeat Temer’s attacks! Defend our jobs, wages, labor and social rights!***

Reject “democratic” capitalist solutions! For a revolutionary workers’ government!

In this critical moment, the bourgeois “democratic” illusions that certain left groups have spread are not admissible – such as the proposals for “General Elections” (**PSTU/IWL; MES/Movimento; LSR/CWI**) or for a “Constituent Assembly” (**MRT/Left Voice/Trotskyist Fraction; Esquerda Marxista/IMT**). It is simply not possible to make use of the bourgeois elections to transform society in the interests of working people. Neither a Constituent Assembly on a capitalist basis would be able to make the structural changes necessary for workers. The political perspective that should be defended by revolutionaries during the struggles against Temer’s attacks is that of a **revolutionary worker’s government**, in order to clearly differentiate themselves from the reactionary “anti-corruption” mobilizations, the utopian class-collaboration project of the PT and the illusions that the workers’ problems can be solved within the limits of capitalism.

Revolutionary Regroupment strives to build a revolutionary party that fight for the following demands:

- ***No more lay-offs!*** For the reduction of working hours without loss of pay, allowing the return of laid-off workers and the creation of jobs for the unemployed. The capitalists are the ones who must pay for the crisis of their system!
- ***Put a halt to the effects of growing inflation!*** We demand immediate raise of wages according to the rise of prices and also a minimum wage that meets the basic needs of the working family, currently calculated at R\$ 3,725!
- ***Down with the Outsourcing Bill!*** For the integration of outsourced workers to the regular staff of the companies to which they provide work, with full rights and wage equality! Against sexism and racism, fight for equal pay for equal work!
- ***Down with the reform of Social Security and the cuts on the budget of social programs!*** Tax the big fortunes to fund social security, housing, transportation and education!
- ***No more oil auctions and the destruction of Brazil’s state-owned oil company Petrobras!*** For the full re-nationalization of Petrobras and the expropriation without compensation and under workers’ control of the foreign oil companies!
- ***Down with religious interference on women’s rights!*** For the legalization of abortion, with the guarantee of free and safe procedure by the public health system!
- ***Down with the ‘super authority’ of the Judiciary!*** For the right of the people to elect the judges and other positions of responsibility! No more privileges for the corrupt political caste: that all elected members of parliament receive only the average wage of a worker!
- ***Land for those who want to live and work on it!*** Expropriation of the land and estate of large capitalist owners for the benefit of the population!
- ***Down with Rousseff’s Anti-terror Law! For the dissolution of the Military Police and other repressive forces!*** To protest is not a crime! For the right to self-defense! Drop all charges against those who fight the injustices of capitalism! Immediate freedom to Rafael Braga, homeless black worker imprisoned during the 2013 mass protests!

Two Polemics with the Trotskyist Fraction (Argentinian PTS / *Left Voice* network)



The Argentinian PTS in the streets in a joint column with the Partido Obrero, as the Workers' Left Front (FIT) (photo La Izquierda Diario)

On the Trotskyist Fraction's centrist zigzags

Icaro Kaleb, originally published in Portuguese in November 2015

Hace aproximadamente dos años, publicamos una larga polémica con la Fracción Trotskista, organización internacional del PTS argentino [1]. Esa polémica trataba sobre la construcción del partido revolucionario y de lo que, para nosotros, consiste en la estrategia **centrista** de la Fracción Trotskista en ese terreno: apostar en la aproximación y en la amalgama con corrientes oportunistas de la “familia del trotskismo”. Esa postura se revela en sus publicaciones, a lo largo de los años, de recurrentes llamados de unidad a varios grupos revisionistas. En esas publicaciones de la FT, generalmente son ignoradas o minimizadas muchas veces en que esos grupos renegaron los principios del marxismo.

About two years ago we published a lengthy polemical article directed to the Trotskyist Fraction (Fracción Trotskista) [1], which is the international organization of the Argentinian PTS (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas). The polemic was about the task of building a revolutionary party and what we consider the

Trotskyist Fraction's centrist strategy on this issue: they try to approach opportunist groups of the "family of Trotskyism" with the aim of mixing with them inside common political blocs. This position is revealed by the TF's constant appeals for programmatic unity addressed to various revisionist groups. On these occasions, the TF usually ignores or minimizes the many times the opportunist currents they are wooing rejected major Marxist principles such as class independence.

The Argentinian "Workers Left Front" (FIT)

As we discussed in that piece, the Argentinian Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores (FIT – Workers Left Front) has been the main arena in which the PTS has tried to implement this position in recent years. The FIT is an electoral coalition among the PTS and two other organizations that claim the Trotskyist heritage – the Partido Obrero (PO) of Jorge Altamira and the Izquierda Socialista (IS – Argentinian section of the Morenoite Unidad Internacional de los Trabajadores).

The FIT is not a bloc of class collaboration, meaning it is not what Trotskyists usually call a "popular front" with bourgeois parties. Therefore, in certain cases, a critical electoral support to the FIT candidates would be a principled tactic. However, the FIT is not just a tactical electoral bloc with the purpose of allowing working class groups to participate in the bourgeois elections of Argentina. For us, it is clear that the PTS regards the FIT as a trampoline to build political unity with the other left groups in it, especially the Partido Obrero. On certain occasions, the TF recognizes this, but on others they deny it. The PTS is always putting pressure on the other groups to maintain their unity beyond the electoral period, it is, to form a permanent bloc. In that sense, the TF has repeatedly said that the FIT is a "revolutionary front" and an embryo to a revolutionary party.

Since we wrote our article, we've had many conversations with Trotskyist Fraction militants in Brazil about this topic. One of the answers we heard was that the intention of the PTS was not to merge with the opportunist groups, but that the FIT was simply a "united front", a collaboration for practical purposes, especially to allow the groups to participate in the bourgeois elections under Argentina's restrict electoral law. The same opinion was broadcast by the German section of the Trotskyist Fraction (RIO – Revolutionary Internationalist Organization):

"Another important issue for the formation of the FIT is the question of electoral fronts as a **temporary united front** based on partial agreements in a concrete situation, as opposed to long-term projects that are based on more profound agreements in terms of program, strategy and practice. The FIT is by no means a project that has been designed in terms of a long-term alignment of the PTS with the PO, but on the concrete necessity of a united workers' front against bourgeois repression." (our emphasis)
-- **The electoral campaign of the FIT in Argentina. July 27th, 2011**
<http://www.onesolutionrevolution.org/?p=757&language=en>

However the PTS itself is now clearly denying that the FIT is a "united front". As the FIT has recently undergone a harsh dispute involving the formation of the slate for presidential elections, the PTS wrote several articles to answer the PO's leader assertion that the bloc was only a "united front":

"The FIT is a bloc of agitation among three parties that claim to be Trotskyists and defend a program of transitional demands, class independence and a workers' government. **This is not a 'united front'**, but a regroupment of left formations which claim to be revolutionary and are not yet big parties; and their objective is to agitate a common revolutionary program in electoral processes. The program of the FIT, more than the program of a 'united front', opens the way for debating the necessity of a revolutionary party, a proposal we have raised in many opportunities and which our allies have, unfortunately, systematically denied." (our emphasis).
-- **The Partido Obrero at the Luna Park and Jorge Altamira's speech. November 9, 2014.** <http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/El-Partido-Obrero-en-el-Luna-Park-y-el-discurso-de-Jorge-Altamira> (in Spanish)

This statement, among many others put out by the PTS leadership, confirms what we have written (and what some Trotskyist Faction militants and even their German section failed to recognize). It is, that the PTS goal inside the FIT is to seek programmatic unity with blatantly opportunist parties.

Another (verbal) answer we frequently got was the recognition that “yes, the Trotskyist Fraction does issue calls for programmatic unity with opportunist groups” (what is evident just by reading the quote above). But, continues the answer, this would be just a “tactic” designed for the rank and file of these opportunist groups. The goal would be to show them that the PTS is not running away from the debate, that it’s not a sectarian group. If this were true, it would imply the TF does not actually intend to have unity with the revisionists, but that the TF only “says so” as a way of winning over the opportunists’ ranks.

We have a serious problem with this “explanation”. First of all, because it is dishonest. The Trotskyist Fraction’s supposed “tactic” – if it indeed is all that is – would consist of telling one thing to these ranks (that they desire unity with them) while actually having other intentions. Besides, if this is the truth, that would be a crappy “tactic” for the purpose of convincing these militants to join the TF. The TF often makes sharp correct criticisms of the PO and the Morenoites. However, these criticisms lose much of their value when, every now and then, the TF says that these opportunist groups “defend a program of transitional demands, class independence and a workers’ government” (as they supposedly do within the FIT).

It’s inevitable that most dedicated militants will remain in their current centrist organizations even if s/he concedes the existence of some errors, if these errors are considered somehow correctable in the long run. To win over the members of an opportunist group it is necessary to clearly expose their leaderships’ revisionist method. Revolutionaries must patiently explain to the ranks of these currents how the politics of their leaders can only lead the proletariat into defeats. Instead, the TF chooses to make these appeals for discussions and unity to the opportunists. As Trotsky wrote: “If a text book on physics contained only two lines on God as the first cause it would be my right to conclude the author is an obscurantist.” What are the Trotskyist Fraction’s many correct criticisms worth of when (in way more than two lines) they consider the opportunists capable of defending a “common revolutionary program” with the PTS?

How many times have these very same groups crossed class independence? Let’s not forget the various occasions in which the PO supported bourgeois platforms in the elections, the most noteworthy being their vote for Evo Morales’ 2006 campaign in Bolivia [2]. Or the time the Morenoites of Izquierda Socialista hailed NATO’s takeover of Libya in 2011 as a popular victory against dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi [3]. In 2012, the PO raised the perspective of a “left government” (led by SYRIZA) to rule over the bourgeois state in Greece and insisted this could be a solution to the political and economic crisis of this country [4]. The Morenoites, on their part, claimed the military coup against the Egyptian government in 2013 was a “victorious democratic revolution” [5]. The Trotskyist Fraction knows better, since they have criticized all these opportunist positions. So we can safely say that the TF’s statement that the PO and the IS (along with the PTS) defend “class independence” and “a workers government” is a centrist capitulation. It is centrist precisely because while on some occasions the opportunist groups are correctly criticized, these criticisms are intertwined with the TF’s occasional appeals for unity and the claim they raise a “revolutionary program”.

These appeals are not limited to an Argentinian context, but rather consist of the entire international perspective of the Trotskyist Fraction. See, for instance, the campaign initiated by the TF a couple of years ago “For a Movement for a Revolutionary Socialist International” (which seems to have been silently put aside). This campaign issued a Manifesto calling for the “regroupment” of a myriad of groups and tendencies around positions on the situation in Greece and the Arab Spring:

“We are making this proposal especially to the comrades of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) of France, both to those who, with us, make up Platform Z, and to those who are grouped together in Platform Y, who see that it is necessary to confront the policy of the majority leadership of the NPA... and to the comrades of the United Secretariat from other countries who are confronting the majority’s

orientation of reproducing this type of bloc with reformists, and those who are resisting the line of subordination to SYRIZA in Greece; to the leaders and workers who constitute the left wing of the miners of Huanuni in Bolivia ...; to the comrades of the Partido Obrero of Argentina and to the Coordinating Committee for the Re-foundation of the Fourth International, with whom we make up, in Argentina, the Front of the Left and the Workers, and with whom we have agreed on different actions in the national and international class struggle; and to all those organizations of the revolutionary Left, or of the workers' and young people's vanguard, that seek a road towards the revolution.”
-- *For a Movement for a Revolutionary Socialist International – The Fourth International. August 20, 2013.*

<http://www.leftvoice.org/For-a-Movement-for-a-Revolutionary-Socialist-International-The-Fourth-International>

It is clear that the groups and tendencies included in this appeal have political differences with the TF not only on the Arab Spring and on Greece but on many other questions as well. Some TF leaders think these appeals are some sort of “maneuver” while many ranks prefer to ignore the existence of such statements or buy the idea that they consist of “tactics” to win over the ranks of the opportunist organizations. Whatever is the reason for the appeals (if not itself the result of centrist confusion), they are a capitulation and a compromise with centrism that deeply undermines any serious attempt to defeat opportunism in the workers’ movement.

First the Brazilian PSTU, now the Partido Obrero...

Today the PTS is wooing and raising appeals for unity with the Partido Obrero of Argentina and the other groups in the FIT, which are considered to have a “common revolutionary program”. But until a few years ago, the Trotskyist Fraction had its attention devoted to the Brazilian Morenoites of the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado). In 2006, for example, the TF published an “open letter the PSTU and the LIT” (LIT/IWL is the PSTU’s international organization). They wrote:

“Our current, just like the LIT, has correctly criticized the turn to the right of most international groups that claim Trotskyism, a phenomenon you call ‘opportunist rendezvous’... Recently, the PO took steps in the same direction and voted for Evo Morales’ popular front in Bolivia, and later for Romano Prodi in Italy. We consider that, just like us, the comrades of the PSTU and the LIT had the merit of not committing any of these capitulations mentioned and it is based on these political agreements that we propose to open a national and international discussion.”
Open letter to the militants of the PSTU and the LIT. May 5, 2006.
<http://www.palavraoperaria.org/E-necessaria-uma-politica-ofensiva-de-construcao-de-um-partido-revolucionario> (in Portuguese)

First of all, in 2013 the TF had apparently “forgotten” about these opportunist positions of the PO, since they then claimed to “have agreed” with them on “different actions in the national and international class struggle”. By the same token, in 2006 the TF had “forgotten” all the opportunist history of the Morenoites, including their support to “popular fronts” with the bourgeoisie, like the ones built around the Brazilian Workers Party, which the PSTU had voted for just a few years before [6].

The TF’s intentions “to open a national and international discussion” with the Morenoites was apparently frustrated by the PSTU’s own turn to the right in recent years, which involved their support to the overthrow of governments by right-wing sectors of the bourgeoisie as supposed “successful democratic revolutions”, including even processes led by the imperialist powers (Libya, Ukraine, twice in Egypt). If revolutionaries are supposed to be the “political memory” of the workers and warn them about treacherous reformist and opportunist leaders, in this case the TF couldn’t remember (or, what is even worse, pretended not to remember) their own writings.

Conclusion

All the attempts by the Trotskyist Fraction to justify their capitulation involve the idea that they're actively struggling to build a mass revolutionary party as quickly as possible. All those who make criticisms to them on this issue are labeled "sectarians" who are not actively pursuing other left groups and will never build a party.

It is certainly important for revolutionaries to look for opportunities of fusion with other left-wing organizations. But there are some considerations to be made. In any attempt of fusion, there must be no "amnesty" towards the "weak spots" or centrist policies of the other groups, specially when they continue to apply the same politics as before. The history of the construction of the Fourth International gives us numerous examples of how to engage with young centrist organizations and win over their ranks (in some cases, the entire organizations) to a revolutionary perspective. To succeed in this, however, there must be no concessions of program, no illusions that any of these centrists can play a progressive role without a critical account and break from their previous politics. There is not even a whim of that from the groups to which the Trotskyist Fraction issue their appeals. Both the Brazilian PSTU and the Argentinian PO, for example, are consolidated centrist organizations, with decades of treacherous positions and methods. It is highly unlikely, to say the minimum, that these groups could be won as a whole to genuine Trotskyism. Even if this was possible, it certainly would not happen through the Trotskyist Fraction's diplomatic approach of not mentioning shameful past positions of these groups when they issue their "open letters". Their opportunism cannot be put under a rug. Debating it as much as possible is the only way to build a revolutionary party.

Just like most centrists wobble between an ostensibly revolutionary position and an openly opportunist one, so does the Trotskyist Fraction on regard to their position towards the revisionist groups of Trotskyism. Sometimes clear criticisms, sometimes a capitulation followed by a desire of unity. But the Fourth International won't be rebuilt by "maneuvers" of any kind. Only a sharp and consistent criticism of opportunism can lead us to the rebirth of the world party of socialist revolution. As Trotsky once wrote about centrism:

"... The new International cannot form itself in any other way than that of struggle against centrism. Ideological intransigence and flexible united front policy are, in these conditions, two weapons for attaining one and the same end.

"The centrist, never sure of his position and his methods, regards with detestation the revolutionary principle: State that which is; it inclines to substituting, in the place of political principles, personal combinations and petty organizational diplomacy.

"The centrist always remains in spiritual dependence upon right groupings, is induced to court the goodwill of the most moderate, to keep silent about their opportunist faults and to regild their actions before the workers.

"... It is precisely on this plane that one must now deliver the principle blows at centrism. For carrying out this work with success it is essential to have one's hands free, that means not only maintaining complete organic independence, but also critical intransigence concerning the most 'left' of the ramifications of centrism."

-- **Two Articles on Centrism, 1934.** <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/02/centrism.htm>

NOTES

[1] [*Fração Trotskista e sua ruptura incompleta com o morenismo*](#) (May 2013).

[2] Read our critique of this position in [*PCO, Partido Obrero e as frentes populares*](#) (February 2013).

[3] Check *La revolución árabe y el final de Kadafi*, available in Spanish at: <http://www.uit-ci.org/index.php/noticias-y-documentos/revolucion-arabe/43-la-revolucion-arabe-y-el-final-de-kadafi> To read a

critique by Revolutionary Regroupment of a similar position taken by the PSTU/IWL, see: [*PSTU, Fração Trotskista e a defesa da Líbia contra o imperialismo*](#) (November 2011).

[4] Check *La pulseada entre el FMI y Syriza*, available in Spanish at <http://www.po.org.ar/prensaObrera/1224/internacionales/la-pulseada-entre-el-fmi-y-syriza> To read the critique published by the PTS, see: *Los revolucionarios y la cuestión del “gobierno de izquierda”*. Available in Spanish at: <http://www.pts.org.ar/Los-revolucionarios-y-la-cuestion-del-gobierno-de-izquierda>

[5] Check *Egipto: la movilización revolucionaria derribó a Mursi!*, available in Spanish at <http://www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar/index.php/noticias/internacionales/112-egipto-la-movilizacion-revolucionaria-derribo-a-mursi> To read a critique by Revolutionary Regroupment of a similar position taken by the PSTU/IWL, see: [*O golpe militar no Egito e a posição escandalosa do PSTU/LIT*](#) (October 2013).

[6] Check their statement at the time: *PSTU chama voto em Lula* (2002), available in Portuguese at <http://www.pstu.org.br/node/3435> To read a critique by Revolutionary Regroupment of the Morenites’ practice of supporting popular fronts, see: [*A Frente de Belém na lógica do morenismo*](#) (August 2012).

Cats do not lay eggs

Trotskyist Fraction’s demand for a Constituent Assembly

Icaro Kaleb, originally published in Portuguese in May 2016

The Trotskyist Fraction (TF) is the group responsible for the online newspaper *Left Voice* and its international network (*Red Izquierda Diario*). Its main section is the Argentinian PTS. Amid the current political crisis in Brazil, its section – the MRT (Workers’ Revolutionary Movement) – has raised the slogan for an “immediate in-depth democratic response capable of really addressing the needs and wishes of the ‘low classes’, a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly”. The demand for a Constituent Assembly is often raised by the TF in various different scenarios. It was raised during Argentina’s mass uprisings in 2001; following the Honduras coup d’etat in 2009; during the Spanish *indignados* movement in 2011 and many other occasions.

In Brazil it has not been different: the call for a Constituent Assembly appeared in the TF’s agitation during the 2013 massive street protests and now again, when the Brazilian working class is facing the upswing of authoritarianism and the growth of bourgeois reaction. In this very different context, this call once again becomes central to the TF’s politics. It is undeniable that this demand is not an accessory, but central to the TF’s perspective of how to defeat the bourgeois state. We agree neither with the way such demand is raised by the TF nor with its supposedly usefulness in Brazil at the moment.

How we see the demand for a Constituent Assembly

As Marxists, we are for expanding and defending workers’ democratic rights under capitalism, while at the same time recognizing their limits and fragility. We thus include in our program demands against the removal of such rights and seek to enlarge the possibilities of political intervention for the working class. It is better for workers (including the workers’ parties) to be able to broadcast their ideas, openly demonstrate and debate politics with as much freedom as possible. Even the bourgeois elections, which cannot change the proletariat’s position as an

oppressed class, offer the possibility of spreading the revolutionary program and denouncing capitalism in an open way.

We believe that no TF comrade disagrees with us on this. We also think that the demand for a Constituent Assembly is functional for this purpose of expanding the democratic rights within capitalist society, especially when democratic and constitutional rights do not exist. For instance, we defended the call for a Constitutional Assembly (as well as other democratic demands) in Libya and Syria when civil wars between different factions of the bourgeoisie erupted. Our intention was to denounce both the decade-long dictatorships of these countries and their pseudo-democratic opposition, which never defended even the most elementary democratic rights.

But our focus was to agitate the need for a working class political movement, independent from the bourgeois factions. Only a workers and peasants' government could really guarantee the defense of their class interests. If a Constituent Assembly were imposed to the bourgeoisie during the struggle, it could represent important democratic gains, but it could not become a direct "pathway" to or an organ of workers' rule itself. That is the reason why we also centrally raised **transitional demands** to denounce the limits of capitalism and to raise the prospect of overcoming it. As it was discussed in the *Transitional Program* (1938):

"Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program* which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program* which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word *socialism* is used only for holiday speechifying....

"The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism – and this occurs at each step – the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old 'minimal program' is superseded by the *transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution."

For us, the call for a Constituent Assembly is part of the democratic "minimum" program, which historical purpose is to broaden the space for proletarian action and political discussion. But for regimes in which constitutional and democratic rights already exist (despite their limitations and more than occasional disrespect by the capitalist state) this demand is like drying ice, while other democratic demands may still maintain their relevance.

It is a well-known fact that the Bolsheviks raised the demand for a Constituent Assembly during the struggle of the Russian working class against Tsarism. Lenin's party continued to demand a Constituent Assembly while the capitalist Provisional Government continuously postponed its realization. The Fourth International proposed this demand for the colonies in the 1930s: "*It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India.*"

These are all cases of countries in which basic democratic liberties and a parliamentary system had never existed; capitalism had been gradually introduced without a profound bourgeois democratic revolution. The theory of Permanent Revolution describes how the capitalist class in backward countries is extremely weak and incapable of conducting a revolutionary transformation. It is up to the working class to lead the national revolution against imperialist oppression and the remnants of previous non-capitalist social systems.

With this being said, it is obvious that the struggle for a Constituent Assembly should not constitute a separate stage in the fight for workers' rule. But at the same time, it should not be considered an equivalent or the main objective of class struggle. Unlike the Morenoites and other defenders of "two-stage" strategies, we do not believe it is necessary to have a separate period of democratic capitalist regime prior to the fight for socialism, even in capitalist dictatorships. Rather, we warn workers about the risks of allowing the bourgeoisie to maintain its class power under a "democratic" basis, as happened with the end of several South American dictatorial regimes in the 1980s.

As revolutionaries, we would in no circumstance support a bourgeois government, including one established by a Constituent Assembly. The democratic demand for such an assembly has the aim of advancing certain democratic rights against a far more authoritarian regime; it does **not** mean extending political support to the capitalist state. That is the reason why we would also never assign a Constitutional Assembly the duty of defending workers' interests. Only a proletarian government based on workers' power can do so. There is no reason to believe in the "democratic" credentials of a bourgeois parliamentary regime.

The Trotskyist Fraction's version of the Constituent Assembly

Let's take a look at how the TF / MRT in Brazil has raised the demand for the Constituent Assembly:

"For us, this plan of struggle against the austerity measures and the institutional coups has to be strong enough to impose a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly to fight corruption to its root, to make the capitalists pay for the crisis and face the structural problems of the country"
<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/MRT-propoe-um-plano-de-luta-contr-o-impeachment-e-os-ataques-do-governo-do-PT>

"Since the beginning of the political crisis, the MRT has proposed that... it is necessary for workers to politically confront all the 'rules of the game' in this bourgeois democracy of 'bribery and bullets'. This would be accomplished through a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly imposed by workers' mobilizations."
<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/A-Assembleia-Constituente-dentro-do-programa-dos-revolucionarios>

"A sovereign and free Constituent Assembly would have other issues to deal with, such as canceling the public debt, making a radical land reform and breaking the deals of subordination to imperialism, besides guaranteeing massive investments in education, healthcare, transportation and housing..."
<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/por-uma-assembleia-constituente-livre-e-soberana-imposta-pela-forca-da-mobilizacao>

The substance assigned to this Constitutional Assembly by the TF is the one of a body capable of fulfilling tasks far beyond democratic and constitutional rights. For them, it would also be able to "make the capitalists pay for the crisis", "face the structural problems of the country", "make a radical land reform", "break the deals of subordination to imperialism". In one line, the TF's Constituent Assembly would be able to change "the rules of the game".

Implicit in this program and orientation seems to be the idea that a democratic "minimum" demand such as the establishment of a Constituent Assembly could actually achieve a revolutionary transformation. The TF has assigned the Constituent Assembly the ability to do something that only a revolutionary workers' government could. This is the opposite of what Marxists should say. They should make clear that no capitalist regime, no matter how democratic, can ever assure the interests of the workers and the oppressed (especially those interests listed by the TF / MRT). Even if we considered that the demand for a Constituent Assembly were appropriate for the 2016 situation in Brazil (which we don't), the way the TF has been agitating it would amount to confusion and, therefore, be counter-productive.

To make it clear: no Constituent Assembly, especially when there is already a democratic regime installed, can change the “rules of the game”. To do so, we need a socialist revolution to place political power in the hands of the organized working class. No Constituent Assembly can make what the TF is demanding from it. Probably even certain basic democratic demands will only be accomplished by a workers’ government. If the TF agrees with this, how can they explain their delusional expectations from a bourgeois institution?

A Constituent Assembly in Brazil now?

There is also the fact that the call for a Constitutional Assembly is made when Brazil is a democratic regime and is witnessing the growth of right-wing conservatism. The current Congress, elected in 2014, has been the most right-wing in decades. Very probably, a new Constitution would reflect this mood and would end being less democratic than the current Brazilian Constitution (which dates from 1988). This is such a real possibility that the TF / MRT has been criticizing the Morenoites’ (and others’) slogan for new “general elections” on the same basis:

“The elections they [the Morenoites] are proposing, besides projecting no in-depth solution for the political crisis, since it does not propose a break with the current regime, would have an immediate right-wing effect, because it would certainly bring in the representatives of the bourgeois political parties, just as corrupt and pro-austerity as those currently in government, if not worse.”
http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/spip.php?page=gacetilla-articulo&id_article=5498

Then we can ask the TF: would a Constituent Assembly be any different? The Constituent Assembly is also established through bourgeois elections; it also does not mean a break with the “democracy of the rich”; wouldn’t it likely produce a more undemocratic Constitution than the one that now exists in Brazil? The TF has responded to these concerns in a very shallow manner:

“We do not want to keep this rotten political regime, but change all the rules of the game. The motivation behind the arguments of those who say that in this conjuncture ‘a new Constituent would be more reactionary than the 88 one’ is the complete subservience to this Constitution engineered by the military, besides their skepticism towards the development of workers’ power in class struggle to impose these demands and defy the 88 regime.”
<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/A-Assembleia-Constituente-dentro-do-programa-dos-revolucionarios>

To say that any risk of a Constituent Assembly generating a regime even less democratic than the one that exists now is “skepticism” is sheer willful blindness and contradicts the TF’s own argument about the probable result of “general elections”. Skepticism is in general a good thing, but one does not have to be pessimistic to realize the mood in the country and the fact that the right-wing bourgeois parties would be capable of doing so. Since the Constituent Assembly is a bourgeois regime, it could produce a more reactionary result when there is already a democracy in Brazil.

The TF says that the Constituent Assembly they defend is “totally different” from the perspective some bourgeois politicians may have. It would be “imposed by the power of workers’ mobilizations”. But if the working class had enough power to impose solutions against the capitalists’ interests, why should Marxists propose an “in-depth solution” limited to bourgeois democracy? Even in the best case scenario of a progressive result, the Constituent Assembly should never be labeled an “in-depth solution” to any of the problems of capitalism.

There is a deep, deep confusion underlying the TF’s position. While it is never clearly stated, *their* idea of a Constituent Assembly is contradictorily proletarian and bourgeois at the same time. It is bourgeois because it is clear that a Constitutional Assembly can never overcome the capitalist regime. But by saying that it is capable of advancing a workers’ program (which is not really plausible) and that it would “change the rules of the game”, the TF is trying to make it resemble a proletarian organ. One thing has nothing to do with the other.

The Trotskyist Fraction reminds us of an anecdote about a farmer who strives all year long to buy a hen, expecting it to lay healthy eggs. The farmer is fooled, though, and the purchase ends up being a cat disguised in a bag of feathers. Cats do not lay eggs. No Constituent Assembly can accomplish the demands that are proletarian to the bone. In fact, we should not even necessarily trust that it would guarantee some of the more advanced democratic rights. But this is what the TF is expecting it to do.

The TF and the 1934 “Program of Action for France”

One of the arguments we heard when we discussed those issues with TF / MRT members in Brazil was that Trotsky had raised the Constituent Assembly demand in France in the 1930s, as a perspective against growing authoritarianism. We don’t think so. Therefore, it is important to rebut this historical claim. The TF / MRT militants usually point out to Trotsky’s 1934 *Program of Action for France*. This is also the article quoted in a TF article in which they debate Trotsky and Gramsci to justify their demand for a Constituent Assembly:

“Slogans such as for all public officials to get the same pay as a worker; that all judges and state representatives be elected and have revocable positions; for the fusion of the executive and the legislative into one single house that put an end to the presidency and the senate, **which we defend as the content of a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly**, were not invented by us. These are all demands of the first workers’ government experience in history, the 1871 Paris Commune.”
<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/A-Assembleia-Constituente-dentro-do-programa-dos-revolucionarios>

The TF is saying that all these democratic demands were not their invention, but were developed by the Paris Commune and since integrated into the Marxist program. That is absolutely correct. But then, they write that it is they who defend these demands as “the content of a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly”. But is it necessary, in order to defend this program of radical democratic demands, to also spread the illusion that it can be fulfilled by a bourgeois parliament? The Paris Commune, which not only raised, but also executed these demands, was *par excellence* an organ of workers’ power. It took the power from the hands of the exploiters and this was the precondition of its deeds. But to demand their fulfillment by a Constituent Assembly – a body which assumes the continuation of bourgeois rule – is to flirt with the “two-stage” idea of building a “radically different” bourgeois regime as a step forward to socialism. **There is absolutely no identity between the Paris Commune and a Constitutional Assembly.**

Let’s go back to Trotsky’s 1934 “Program of Action”. It was written when the authoritarian government of Doumergue was harshly attacking workers’ rights, while the French Fascists were gaining momentum. It is a program of transitional demands to guide the workers and was defended by the French section of the movement for the Fourth International, the *Ligue Communiste*. After re-reading this document we found no demand for a Constituent Assembly of any sort in it. This demand is also remarkably absent from all other Trotsky’s writings on France from that period, including all articles reprinted in “Whither France?”. What Trotsky did was to emphasize the need for workers’ and peasants’ power:

“Only the laboring masses, taking their future into their own hands, in one powerful revolutionary thrust, can energetically and with iron create the necessary great power to save society from the capitalist oligarchy that corrupts it and leads it to ruin.

“The task is to replace the *capitalist state*, which functions for the profit of the big exploiters, by the workers’ and peasants’ *proletarian state*. The task is to establish in this country the rule of the working people.”

The TF tries to justify their assertion on the basis of Trotsky’s demand for a “Single Assembly” in one of the points of this program. But as the TF itself recognizes, this meant the abolition of the Senate and the presidency, which at the time were ahead of the authoritarian attacks, besides the fact that the French Senate was not elected by universal suffrage then. These are the demands raised in this item of the program:

“Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion! Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!”

Trotsky raises several democratic demands that questions the limits of bourgeois democracy. Those radical democratic demands point to the corporatism and elitist character of the capitalist regime. The workers’ movement must fight for a program of this nature, even if it isn’t exactly a socialist program. The TF cannot accuse us of not raising this kind of democratic demand or of ignoring the need to defend bourgeois democracy. We also raised demands which resemble the spirit of the ones written on the “Program of Action” in our agitation in face of the recent impeachment processes against Dilma Rousseff:

“Down with the ‘Anti-terror’ Law, which is meant to be used against social movements! For the dissolution of the Military Police and other repressive forces! For the right to demonstrate, a democratic right increasingly curbed by capitalist governments! Drop all charges against those who fight the injustices of capitalism!

[...]

“Down with the super authority of Judge Sergio Moro and the Judiciary! For the right to elect judges and other positions of responsibility! No more privileges for the corrupt political caste: that all elected members of parliament receive only the average wage of a worker!”

We agree with Trotsky that “A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers’ power” and this is why we defend basic democratic rights. Some democratic demands can certainly be imposed during the struggle and facilitate workers’ tasks. But only the establishment of a proletarian government could seriously execute a program of radical democratic and socialist demands.

The *Program of Action* is composed of anti-capitalist demands from top to bottom. There is also a strong emphasis on the slogan for workers’ power, as in “*Down with the Bourgeois ‘Authoritative State’! For Workers’ and Peasants’ Power*” and “*The Struggle for the Workers’ and Peasants’ Commune*”. These are the organs capable of executing Trotsky’s program. The Russian revolutionary did not think that talking openly about it, even when the situation was not revolutionary, amounted to “sectarianism” or defense of a “maximum program”, as some TF comrades insinuated to us regarding our program.

Our difference with the TF lies in the fact that we do not believe that an “immediate in-depth democratic response capable of really addressing the needs and wishes of the ‘low classes’” **is** “a sovereign and free Constituent Assembly”. We combine demands to defend and expand democratic rights with a transitional program adapted to the 2016 Brazilian reality. We defend the immediate unity of the working class – united front – to defeat the bosses and the government’s authoritarian laws and austerity measures. Differently from the TF, though, our “in-depth solution” to the crisis is the same as Trotsky’s: a workers’ and peasants’ government. It is an objective that the TF has in practice subordinated to the one of a bourgeois Constituent Assembly, as if it could supposedly fulfill workers’ program for socialism.

Syrian Civil War, the Islamic State and the battle of Kobanî

Defend Syria against imperialism! For a position of class independence in the civil war!

By Icaro Kaleb. This article was originally written between June and July 2015. Because of internal difficulties, it could not be published then and became partially outdated due to the speed of events in the Syrian civil war. Nevertheless, it still responds to a number of political issues that remain central in this complex conflict and also deals with the opportunist positions of ostensibly Trotskyist organizations. Thus, we decided to publish it in January 2016 (originally in Portuguese) adding some comments between brackets.



Assad oppositioners in the streets of Idlib, 2016 (photo: rs21.org.uk)

Over the last 4 years, the Syrian population has been engulfed in a civil war between a decade-long dictatorship, on one side, and a combination of bourgeois forces which want to form a new regime, on the other. Later, new elements were added to this already complex situation: the territorial advance of the fundamentalist organization Islamic State; the air strikes, bombings and overall imperialist intervention in the country, mainly by the United States military. We dedicate this text to deepen the debate on a few questions addressed some time ago, in our September 2012 article ([*The Syrian Conflict and the Tasks for Revolutionists*](#), available in Portuguese) and update on certain aspects, taking into account these new developments.

We once again want to highlight a factor that most of the left, including many groups that claim to be Trotskyists, have left aside when dealing with the situation in Syria: the need for a position of **class independence** regarding the various bourgeois forces that currently struggle for power. Marxists do not buy the myth that Syria is going through a “revolution” supposedly led by “rebel” armies which fight the government, because these forces are submitted to the interests of various bourgeois fractions. The course of this civil war, though not resolved after four years, points to the need of an independent pole of the working class, opposed to both the Assad dictatorship and the reactionary forces that want to bring it down for their own reactionary

interests. The same dilemma and the need for working class independence is central to the political situation in Kobani.

The character of the main contending forces in Syria

The Assad regime is a two-decade-long one-party capitalist regime, which rules over a poor nation, confined to the world imperialist order. The majority of the human rights violations that have occurred since the beginning of the civil war were committed by the Syrian government. It has Russia as its main international ally, with which it has relevant trade agreements. From the pov of the working class, however, this dictatorial regime deserves no political support.

The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) is the organized body trying to coalesce the different units of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which is a split of the Syrian armed forces. Since 2011, the FSA has gained important positions in the country, but many were lost back to Assad or taken by the Islamic State. In our 2012 article, we explained the political and military composition of the SNC/FSA: the links of its main components with the imperialists and its bourgeois program. Since then, the FSA was gradually dominated by religiously-oriented forces (mainly Sunni leaders dissatisfied with the secular aspects of Assad's Alawite regime). The FSA also started operating in alliance with other forces, such that the "Islamic Front", which arose in 2014.

Despite the illusions of a big part of the international left that the FSA's struggle against Assad's regime is part of a "Syrian revolution", we made it clear on such article that these "rebels" are not a political force capable of (or interested in) achieving gains neither for the Syrian workers nor to the country's oppressed national minorities.

The United States failed to achieve a lasting alliance with most of the rebels, who were not considered enough "moderate". Washington has been more careful in choosing its allies since the disastrous experience in Libya, where many of the weapons sent to the country ended falling into the hands of anti-American extremists. Some specific FSA units, however, received significant military aid from the United States and Obama has already begun to train his own "rebel group", which must as well be denounced as a ground troop of imperialism. As reported:

"The U.S. has decided to provide pickup trucks equipped with machine guns and radios for calling in U.S. airstrikes to some moderate Syrian rebels, defense officials said. But the scope of any bombing hasn't been worked out – a reflection of the complexities of the battlefield in Syria.

...

"The plan comes as the US prepares to begin training moderate rebels, who are waging a fight on two fronts against the extremists and the Syrian regime. Defense officials said that the training will start in mid-March, in Jordan, with a second camp scheduled to open soon after in Turkey."

— ***The United States will give some Syrian rebels the ability to call strikes, February 17, 2015.***

Available at <http://tinyurl.com/kojxzx5>

[January 2016: Russia's entry into the conflict in October 2015, with air strikes and also by sending large amounts of ground forces – initially favoring Assad and later also extending logistical and military support to certain "rebel" forces against the Islamic State – complicated even more the scenario. Currently, everything points to the "solution" of a transitional government that includes the economic interests of both Russia and the U.S. – which, it must be said, are quite different from the interests of Syrian workers and the oppressed nationalities of the country.]

Another reactionary competitor in the Syrian civil war is the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIS, over the previous name "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria"), which recently has gained strength. It was previously part of a same fundamentalist military operation with the Syrian Al-Qaeda (Al-Nusra Front). It was the Al-Nusra Front which broke relations with ISIS in early 2014, stating that they were "too intransigent".

By then, ISIS had already taken over important areas of Iraq. Largely funded by Muslim oil barons from countries which are also supporting certain rebel groups – the so-called “Friends of Syria” (Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) – ISIS used its links with the Syrian opposition to obtain heavy weapons and recruit fighters. It came into power in important Iraqi cities as the spearhead of a Sunni revolt against the Shi’ite-led government backed by the United States. From then on, ISIS had under its control more territories than Al-Qaeda was ever capable of. Many of the towns and villages in its power have large oil production, which ISIS exports in order to finance its expansionist effort. ISIS is at war against the Iraqi government (which is helped by the United States’ troops on the ground) and plan to build a “Caliphate” under its strict control. Around the same time, ISIS strengthened their positions in Syria and took over provinces in the deserted East of the country, as well as the entire border region between Iraq and Syria. It has fought both Assad and opposition forces, especially FSA units.

ISIS seems to be the best trained and equipped of the oppositional forces. About 8 million people live in towns under its controls in both countries and the group was able to establish a kind of “war economy”, in which the population is dependent on the extremist group for food and other necessities. That has so far secured a passive collaboration with their occupation. They have persecuted several non-Muslim minorities (and even some Muslim groups) and frequently boast about their practices of enslaving and trading women of other religions, as well as the massacre of groups of non-Muslim villagers. ISIS currently controls about a third of the Syrian territory, where the Islamic law (Sharia) was imposed.

We consider the Islamic State a form of fundamentalist reaction that seeks to eliminate even the most basic political, social and secular rights. If ISIS achieves complete victory over the Syrian territory it would mean the fall of many ethnic and religious minorities into a state of slavery or their simple execution. A revolutionary workers’ party in Syria would seek to defend the oppressed people and organize the working masses of the cities and the countryside against these vicious thugs. Their defeat is essential for workers. But our call to defeat ISIS does not change our opposition and denunciation of U.S.-led air interventions in the country, even if they are said to be aimed at eliminating ISIS.

The imperialists cannot present a serious alternative to the Syrian people, and have already perpetrated actions tens of times more violent and vicious than those of ISIS. Ultimately, ISIS growth and development itself is a byproduct of the imperialists’ disastrous occupation of Iraq, just to give an example. While the U.S. mainstream media exposes the cruelty of the Islamic State, it hides the acts of terror committed by their own allies in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, which also include many atrocities (not to mention the high number of casualties and injuries caused by death falling from the sky in the form of bombs).

We have no pity for the defeats that the imperialists may suffer in Iraq and Syria (even from the hands of the Islamic State). We do not forget the crimes committed by the imperialists in Iraq (including the deaths of about 200,000 Iraqi civilians) and consider their expulsion from the Middle East, as well as the defeat of any of their “boots on the ground”, as the main priority. But despite the fact that ISIS has been the current target of imperialist bombings, its conquest of Iraqi and Syrian cities in order to establish terror regimes is no form of “anti-imperialist struggle”, but instead reactionary actions.

Obama’s “good intentions” in bombing ISIS to supposedly save minorities in Syria are nothing but lies. The U.S. intervention has the sole purpose of ensuring its grip on the country. Anyone who has doubts about the intentions of the U.S. (and other imperialist powers) in Syria should look at the “big experiments of democracy” that Libya and Iraq have become. The American bombings are intended to gain time and contain ISIS (while at the same time it also weakens Assad’s regime), as Washington tries to better organize the forces loyal to it on the ground.

[January 2016: Currently, this paragraph appears to have become outdated due to the apparent U.S., France and Britain decision to destroy ISIS, in part as a result of pressure put on them by Russian bombings in defense of Assad and partly because of the hue and cry over the fundamentalists’ expansion. However, at the time this

text was written, it appeared that the U.S. strategy revolved around “managing the situation”, it is, let ISIS weaken Assad, while trying to strengthen the positions of the “moderate” rebels loyal to them.]

Besides taking into account the imperialist threat on one hand and the Islamic State on another, one cannot forget that a proletarian revolution in Syria can only triumph over the dead body of Assad’s brutal dictatorship. The dictator and his party imposed the capitalist order for decades, with the most brutal methods. The main priority would be organizing working-class defenses, especially among the persecuted national minorities, in order to fight the various armies struggling for power, thus ensuring the creation of a working class force, politically independent from the reactionary bourgeois competitors.

[August 2016: All the main players are enemies of working class’ interests, but we recognize they do not have the same caliber. Syria is in a quagmire of intertwined confrontations and ever-changing combinations of forces in which it is not always easy to take a tactical military position at each given moment. Revolutionaries who are far from the ground face extra difficulty in following all the events. It would be counterproductive to issue a general tactical position for all the different scenarios and disputes that occur in the war. There are, however, some general political principles that Marxists should follow. The most important is that we oppose the imperialists’ intervention and their ‘boots on the ground’ as a priority. This means we could, in principle, militarily side with Assad’s regime, rebel groups or ISIS on certain occasions in which they confront imperialist forces. Second, we oppose the advances of the Islamic State and would seek to defend the working class and the national and religious minorities under its attack. Third, oppose both sides in the war between Assad’s regime and the rebels led by the SNC and have no reason to support one side’s victory over the other.]

USec and the Morenoites: class collaboration on the battlefield

The groups on the left which claim to defend the victory of a non-existent “Syrian revolution” against Assad use this excuse as a cover to support the efforts of the Free Syrian Army. The main argument is that many of the units participating in it are not subordinate to the Syrian National Coalition. Instead, the FSA is seen by them as a coalition of popular forces emerging from the streets and the protests of the Arab Spring. That is the position, for example, of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec). They published on their website an interview with a member of one of these FSA groups, who claims to be a Marxist. When asked about cooperation with other units of the FSA, this fighter said:

“There is cooperation and coordination, but in a limited way, on the one hand because of divergent views and objectives, or disparities between positions due to the geographic location where comrades are fighting and the nature of other organizations. On the other hand, these organizations do not generally accept anyone else...”

— *“Our lack of weapons puts us in a position of weakness”, 18 January 2015. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/nhjea3b>.*

Said difficulty of coordination with other FSA units should be no surprise, since many of those are led by officials who are loyal and subordinate to the SNC and their reactionary friends. We shall not forget the various Islamic groups that are also under the FSA umbrella, not to mention those “rebel units” which received training and weapons directly from the imperialists and are their loyal allies on the ground.

The FSA is certainly a heterogeneous army. But the question that the USec’s website failed to ask these “Marxist” fighters, and that should have been the first question to be made, is: why this organization (which the USec considers to be “revolutionary Marxist”) is working side by side with those types? Since they claim to represent the Syrian working class, why don’t they, instead, organize a politically independent militia separated from the reactionary and pro-imperialist elements?

In a certain way, the dilemma of those fighters is the same dilemma of the USec and other groups which support the “rebels” against Assad. They do not want to defend an independent proletarian position, separated from the

SNC and the FSA, as they only see immediate possibility of overthrowing Assad's regime by holding hands with those bourgeois forces. They therefore abandon class independence and support the FSA, sugarcoating its nature and program, albeit criticizing its leadership.

A very similar conclusion is shared by other groups which also claim Trotskyism, as the Morenoite International Workers League (LIT-CI, led by the Brazilian PSTU) or the International Workers Unity (UIT-CI, led by the Argentinian Izquierda Socialista). See our previous polemic with the UIT in an October 2012 article available in Portuguese ([*Morenoism and the UIT's Position in Syria*](#)).

Despite the existence of elements deluded by allegedly "democratic" politics in the FSA ranks, it is for most part controlled by SNC officials and other bourgeois forces. The victory of this army would result in no gain for the working class. It is as if the USec, LIT/IWL and UIT believed in some kind of magical "dynamic" that would put the working class in power, or at least in a better position, if Assad was overthrown by the SNC rebels. We have seen this movie in Libya, Ukraine and many other occasions, when such groups supported "mass movements" that had reactionary leaderships and purposes.

The Kurdish question and the battle for Kobanî

In the already complex scenario that is the Syrian civil war, things get even denser when taking into consideration the Kurdish element. Kurdistan is the largest stateless nation in the world. We're talking about 30 million people split around Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Armenia and a small region in Northern Syria (Rojava). This is a legacy of British imperialism's "divide and rule" politics after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Marxists must defend the Kurds' national rights, including the right to self-determination, the use of their language in schools, public administration etc. and must be against any and all forms of segregation. But that does not mean that we consider a territorial separation of the Kurdish regions (or the creation of a Kurdish state) as a "solution" to the problems of the workers of that nationality. We certainly would take the Kurdish side in a war for independence or regional autonomy (including military support) if that is the expressed desire of this people.

But national separation is, for Marxists, an interest subordinated to the proletarian struggle. There are political issues of highest priority, such as the working class political independence and the defense of the oppressed nations under imperialist attack. Here is an illustrative example. In 2003, when the US attacked Iraq, the bourgeois nationalist leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan supported the imperialist invasion against the regime of Saddam Hussein, over promises of greater regional autonomy.

We would defend any autonomy obtained for the Kurdish population. But when the Peshmerga (the army of the Iraqi Kurds) was fighting under the U.S. command, it was not a force struggling for Kurdish independence against Baghdad, but an arm of the imperialist project to subjugate the entire region. Thus, we would oppose the efforts of Kurdish capitalists to support the imperialist invasion, while we would continue to defend the Kurds' national rights.

Today, a similar situation emerges in Iraq, in face of the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State. The main Kurdish political parties in Iraq, KPD (Kurdish Democratic Party) and PUK (Kurdistan Patriotic Union), despite their alleged rivalry, are using their position at the head of the regional government in Northern Iraq to support the imperialists.

But while in Iraqi Kurdistan the scene is dominated by the imperialist stooges, in Syria the most influential political force among the Kurdish population is currently the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is the Syrian associate of the once-Maoist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which operates in Turkey. In 2012, Assad's troops withdrew completely from the Kurdish regions, the territory known as Rojava. It is unclear whether this was due to military conditions or a demagogic attempt to gain the support of the Kurds, or a

combination of both factors. Rojava has since come under control of the PYD. Through its military organization, the People's Protection Units (YPG), the PYD clashed with both the Assad regime and the bourgeois opposition on different occasions. Since the Islamic State began advancing on Northern Syria, though, the YPG has focused their efforts in defeating the fundamentalists.

ISIS operations in Syria first clashed with the Kurds in July 2014, in Kobanî – one of the three cantons under the PYD government, near the border with Turkey. This drew worldwide attention and the Kurdish resistance has won wide sympathy, getting known as the “revolutionaries fighting the Islamic State”. ISIS was finally defeated in the region in early 2015, through a combination of the relentless struggle of the Kurds (who have always been in technical inferiority) and imperialist bombings against ISIS in the region. Kobanî was besieged for months, during which many groups on the left (especially some anarchists) spoke of a “revolutionary character” of the Kurdish resistance.

The PYD is a party founded in 2003 by PKK sympathizers in Syria. It was considered by the Syrian government as a factor of instability, due to its popular support and underground operations in the Kurdish regions. Its main source of ideological orientation is the PKK, which was established in 1978 as a Maoist group dedicated to armed resistance against the oppression of the Kurdish population in Turkey, and has a long history of resistance against the Turkish government.

But it seems that the PKK is no longer an adherent of Maoism and its Stalinist practice of persecution against internal oppositionists and a program of “people’s war” that wobbles between a bourgeois democratic program of “New Democracy” and the prospect of reproducing a bureaucratic state-economy regime like Mao’s China. According to many reports, since the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan (its historical leader) in 1999, the PKK has undergone a programmatic transformation towards what is described by Ocalan himself as “democratic confederalism” – which is inspired by libertarian authors and seeks to build stateless “popular self-governments” in small scale.

The PKK is still considered by NATO and the Turkish government as a “terrorist organization”, and Marxists around the world have the imperative duty to defend the group against all attacks from Erdogan’s brutal regime. Except for a few brief periods of truce (the latter of which dates from 2013), the PKK has continuously fought against the Turkish regime for autonomy for the Kurdish regions. But while it is hard to precisely say how consolidated is this programmatic shift (the PKK continues to be an underground organization), it seems to have definitely changed the group’s outlook.

Trotskyists believe that workers and peasants need a form of political power based on their own organizations in order to crush the bourgeoisie’s military, political and economic domination and prevent the capitalists’ attempts to return to power after a victorious uprising. This authentic “workers government” should cover the whole territory and be based on representatives democratically elected by the workers and peasants (and removable by the same assemblies that elected them). This is the only formula able to balance the local nature of direct democratic management with large-scale working class’ interests in all areas.

Last but not least, such government should give internationalist material and political aid to workers fighting in other countries to defeat “their” own bourgeoisie. Socialism cannot be achieved on a national scale and, ultimately, no workers government can survive isolated in a world dominated by imperialism. The political program of the PKK/PYD seems to ignore the necessity of building this “proletarian dictatorship” based on a collectivized economy and workers centralized military power.

As mentioned, the PYD has control of the Rojava region. In early 2014 it adopted a “Charter of Rojava’s Social Contract, and this constitutional document makes no mention of socialism, collective control of the means of production or workers’ democracy. Instead, it is a confusing combination of community participation and private property maintenance. Article 41 provides that “Everyone has the right to own property and personal ownership is guaranteed,” while Article 42 says that the economic system aims to “ensure participatory economy while

promoting competition in accordance with the principle of democratic management ‘To each according to one’s work’.”

[January 2016: Following the defeat of ISIS, the PYD consolidated its power in a region where all bourgeois parties and governments were defeated or withdrew. The PYD is not a bourgeois party, but an organization based on the mobilization of workers and peasants of that region. The conditions are the most favorable for the establishment of a proletarian government, with workers and peasants’ democratic control over the means of production, the political system and the army. However, the PYD has no clarity about the nature of the regime it wants to build. Despite the PYD’s democratic preaching, the maintenance of capitalist property puts clear limits for further development, due to social inequality and lack of workers’ direct democracy. Given what has happened until now, it seems that the PYD will not break from the bourgeoisie in a definite way. Its ranks, as well as other workers and peasants fighters of the Rojava region, should strive for a revolutionary leadership and reject the PYD’s current vacillations and illusions of a “third way” between capitalism and workers’ power.]

During and after the battle against the Islamic State in Kobanî, the PYD also spread dangerous illusions in the Peshmerga units of the Kurdish regional government in Iraq (from which it received weapons) and in the U.S. air intervention. It released a public statement “thanking” them for their fight against ISIS, during which the PYD gave military tactical advice to the U.S. (like where to bomb). A PYD leader, Saleh Muslim, expressed this attitude in various statements to the press:

“According to Muslim, the international coalition ‘has saved the lives of many civilians’ in its war against IS. [...] He also thanked the international coalition led by the U.S. for supporting the Kurds in their misery and for helping the YPG forces to resist the IS radical group: ‘Such operations reinforce the relationship between Kurds and states that defend democracy and peace’, Muslim concluded.”
— **Syrian Kurds urge U.S.-led coalition to intensify anti-IS strikes in Kobanî, October 13, 2014.**
Available in: <http://tinyurl.com/pkzaufb>.

We believe that Marxists should have defended Kobanî against the advance of ISIS’s fundamentalist reactionaries. What Rojava’s workers and activists with revolutionary intentions urgently need, though, is a political orientation that their current leaders cannot offer. It is necessary to prevent the development of expectations and illusions in the character of the bourgeois government of Iraqi Kurdistan and the imperialist bombings.

The U.S. intended to contain ISIS’s advance in Kobanî for their own reactionary purposes, and not “help” the Kurdish people. The U.S. government is definitely not among the advocates of “democracy and peace” in the world. It should not be forgotten that Washington is a great ally of the Turkish regime of Erdogan, which did everything to prevent the PYD from receiving any help from the PKK bases in Turkey. We do not condemn the PYD for getting arms from any source that was offering them (provided that it did not mean making political concessions). And it certainly had the right to tactically benefit from the fact that ISIS was being targeted by the imperialists, provided it had clarity about the nature of the bombings.

[August 2016: Since January 2016, when we originally published this article, this course of the PYD has deepened. In the beginning of the year it cooperated with U.S. air forces with the aim of expanding into the non-Kurdish Raqqa region, one of ISIS’ main strongholds. Now it is cooperating with Assad in the siege of Aleppo and with imperialist forces in Manbij, cities which are being completely destroyed, with high number of civil casualties. Besides that, in order to push ISIS away from Rojava, the PYD joined forces with several other parties and organizations when they formed the “Democratic Syrian Forces”, a military coalition in which the YPG was the main unit, as well as the “Syrian Democratic Council”, an entity that claims to be for a “federated, democratic and secular Syria” – a clearly class collaborationist move. If it wasn’t for the imperialists’ distrust in the PYD, the DSF/SDC would probably be a very suitable ally for them on the ground.]

Spartacist League: sectarianism on Kobanî

Pointing to the opportunistic positions of the PYD leadership, some groups on the left took the side of the Islamic State in Kobanî (!). This is the case of the degenerated sect (barely) disguised as Trotskyist organization that is the Spartacist League (SL) of the United States and its International Communist League (ICL). They explained their reasons for such an absurd position as follows:

“[...] Iraqi government forces and Kurdish *peshmerga* in Iraq are again conducting joint military operations with the U.S., as they did for years under the occupation. More recently, Syrian Kurdish nationalists have also sealed a treacherous alliance with the U.S. in the battle over Kobani in northern Syria, acting as the imperialists’ bomb spotters and otherwise coordinating military movements. The fact that all these forces are ‘boots on the ground’ for imperialist intervention means that revolutionary Marxists have a military side with ISIS when it targets the imperialists and their proxies, including the Syrian Kurdish nationalists, the *pesh merga*, the Baghdad government and its Shi’ite militias.”
— *Down With U.S. War Against ISIS!*, October 31, 2014. Available in: <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/1055/isis.html>.

In its drive to conquer Kobanî, the Islamic State was not fighting an imperialist stronghold, since there were no U.S. troops on the ground, but to expand its power in the Kurdish areas. The YPG was the only force fighting the fundamentalists with weapons in their hands in Kobanî and, despite the vacillating position of its leadership, it could not be seriously considered as a U.S. “proxy”. The YPG resisted the siege of ISIS in Kobanî for several months even before the imperialists got involved.

Revolutionaries must criticize the illusions propagated by the PYD and its “thank you” full of illusions to the international imperialist coalition. But what was central to determine which side to take on Kobanî was whether these positions and the military tactical collaboration with the imperialists made the PYD a force subordinated to the United States in their efforts to subjugate Syria.

We believe that the U.S. military took advantage of the conflict in Kobanî to bomb and weaken ISIS. But it could not use the PYD, which it still considers a terrorist organization, as a tool to control Northern Syria. After the battle, the U.S. was not able to have any real control over Rojava. The PYD was benefiting from the imperialist bombardments, but was not integrated and subordinated to the military efforts of the imperialists in the region.

[August 2016: reinforcing that statement, at the recent third round of peace meetings sponsored by imperialists in Geneva, no PYD-Rojava representative was invited, due to the U.S. distrust in them, what led the Syrian Democratic Council representatives to withdraw the invitations they received.]

Therefore, the battle for Kobanî did not consist of U.S. agents fighting the Islamic State (as the Spartacist League pictures it), but of a Kurdish resistance force fighting the fundamentalist reactionaries, coordinated with (but not subordinated to) U.S. bombardments. In such a struggle, revolutionaries had a side: with the PYD/YPG against ISIS, while at the same time it was important to warn the Syrian and Kurdish workers and activists not to consider, even momentarily, that the U.S. or the *Peshmerga* could be their “allies”.

What this position demonstrates is that the Spartacist League has completely lost its sense of proportion (if it had any to begin with). The victory of the YPG in Rojava is not the same as the victory of the rebels in Libya in 2011. It was not a *coup d'état* and military revolt orchestrated and coordinated by the imperialists to put a puppet regime in power. The result was the maintenance of a Kurdish party with plebeian roots, which had risen to power as a result of the complex civil war dynamics. The victorious resistance against ISIS was an important move to prevent the advance of fundamentalist reaction.

For proletarian defenses in the midst of the civil war and a workers’revolutionary party!

In face of the religious sectarianism present in the ongoing civil wars in Iraq and Syria (involving Sunni / Shiite rivalry) and the bloodshed on both sides, there is room for the emergence of a non-sectarian resistance of the working class against these crimes. If accompanied by the revolutionary impulse to expel the imperialists from Middle East, prevent the victory of the fundamentalist reaction and defend the Kurds and other ethnic minorities, this position has the potential to develop rapidly among workers who see no alternative among the current forces competing for power.

Currently there is no mass party of the working class in Syria (not even a reformist one), due to Assad's regime decade-long oppression. The only legalized union federation is entirely subject to the state structure and controlled by the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (the regime party). A position contrasting with those currently expressed in the civil war would immediately gain sympathy from the working class, even if initially represented only by a small group of politically solid and dedicated cadres. On the other hand, embellishing any of the major forces in this dispute can only lead to opportunist disaster.

Workers' internationalist solidarity actions are a touchstone of Trotskyism and would be essential to prepare the Syrian, Iraqi, Turkish and Kurdish workers and peasants against "their" respective ruling classes and the vicious imperialist machinations. ***The only way to ensure long-term peace in the region is through victorious socialist revolutions that end with the reactionary capitalist competitors, clan rivalries and their constant dependence on treacherous alliances with the imperialists. The positive result would be the creation of a socialist federation of the Middle East.***

Therefore, the construction of a revolutionary workers party in Syria is an urgent matter. With a full socialist program of workers' control of major industries and agrarian revolution, a Trotskyist organization in Syria would also defend a set of democratic demands against the regime and its reactionary adversaries. This would demonstrate the uncompromising desire of revolutionaries to build a proletarian democracy, as opposed to the false promises of the "democratic" imperialists.

Defend the Palestinians! No confidence in Hamas and Fatah!

Israel's War on Gaza

Originaly published in Portuguese in August 2014



Palestinian man in Gaza, 2014

Over the past few weeks Israel's one-sided war against the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip has, with a combination of bombings and ground troops, led to the deaths of nearly 2000 Palestinians, many of them children. Solidarity protests in the West Bank have also faced repression. It is in the class interests of the international proletariat to put a stop to this latest round of capitalist barbarism. With the full backing of the Obama administration and an implicit green light from the United Nations, the Israeli state has continued its murderous attack against a helpless population.

Despite some historical differences separating them, both Hamas and Fatah, the two political forces currently wielding mass influence amongst Palestinians, represent bourgeois class interests rather than the genuine interests of the oppressed Palestinian masses. Their class position means that in addition to opposing emancipation from capitalism and all the forms of oppression it engenders, they are simultaneously also able to betray the struggle for Palestinian national rights which they claim to represent.

Founded in 1964 as a group employing guerilla tactics with the aim of re-establishing a Palestinian state based on pre-1948 borders, already by the 1970's the PLO, under Fatah's and Yasser Arafat's leadership, had retreated to accepting a "mini-state" based on the West Bank and Gaza, which, logistically, could only leave the populations there militarily surrounded by and at the total mercy of the racist Zionist state. Due to Israeli belligerence, Hamas is currently forced into taking a more militant posture. But its reactionary Islamic fundamentalist politics, which includes opposition to secular democratic rights as well as the rights of women and LGBT, means it too is opposed to the interests of the Palestinian masses.

Along with being incapable of appealing to the class interests of Israeli Jewish workers to abandon Zionism and come to the defense of their Palestinian brothers and sisters, whose combined strength would be capable of ending this massacre, both groups are also politically dedicated to running a capitalist society under any state they rule. Neither deserves the political support of Palestinians fighting to end their oppression.

Palestinians can therefore only achieve victory with a political program aimed at overthrowing capitalism, rather than under the leadership of forces devoted to bourgeois nationalism or religious fundamentalism. However we are not neutral when these forces are resisting the murderous Zionist attacks against the Palestinian population, we are for *militarily* siding with them against the Israeli state. But unlike many leftist groups with deep illusions in Hamas and Arab Nationalism, we do not extend them any *political* support.

Along with the tasks posed before revolutionaries in the Palestinian region, it is also crucial to win international solidarity. In an increasingly globalized economy, strikes and other class struggle actions by workers in other countries can deliver major blows to the Israeli bourgeoisie and its imperialist supporters, strengthening the Palestinians ability to resist.

It is Necessary to Win Solidarity from Israeli Workers!

A common mistake by many groups on the left (beyond capitulating politically to Hamas), is to either ignore or deny the necessity of organizing the Hebrew speaking Israeli workers in a common struggle for socialist revolution in the region. The claim that the entire Israeli Jewish population is one big “imperialist military enclave” or “occupying force” ignores the complex situation of the interpenetration of two peoples in the same territory and the fact that Israel is a class divided society, whose bourgeois state does *not* represent the interests of the Israeli Jewish working class.

Also, at this point in history, it is simply no longer possible to view Israelis as nothing more than colonial settlers. Willy-nilly, they have over time developed in the region as a Hebrew speaking nation. Israeli Jewish workers *can* be convinced to unite with Palestinians because it is ultimately in their class interests to do so. Denying them their national rights can only throw them back into the hands of the Zionists.

In the recent weeks of the attacks, many thousands of Israelis have resisted the military draft in opposition to the Israeli states murders in Gaza, at the same time as mass protests have occurred in cities such as Tel-Aviv. These are demonstrations of the potential of the Jewish proletariat, under the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard party, to defend the Palestinians national rights and defeat the Zionist state from within.

Build a Bi-national Revolutionary Party! For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!

Many groups on the left call for a “secular democratic and sovereign Palestine”, without mention of such a state’s class character. In practice this can only lead to subordinating working class political independence towards the goal of the construction of a bourgeois state in the territory. As proletarian internationalists, we are for building a bi-national revolutionary party composed of Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jewish workers (as well as other ethnic and religious groups living in the area) which expropriates the bourgeoisie in the region, making possible a fraternal co-existence between the two peoples where no one oppresses the other.

As the Palestinians, by themselves, cannot overthrow the Zionist state, being able to win the Israeli Jewish workers to an internationalist perspective is not an option but a necessity. An important measure to allow this union and help overcome the deep fears and suspicions systematically instilled in both groups over all these years would be the recognition of the right to self-determination for *both* groups within democratically redrawn boundaries, if that should be desired. At the same time that a revolutionary party would defend such a measure if it is necessary to move forward, it itself would advocate and struggle to build a single bi-national workers state, within whose framework the two people can build a socialist society together, free of both class and national inequalities.

An eyewitness report

Portugal, the crisis and the left

One of our members visited Portugal in September 2014 and wrote an internal report about the crisis in the country and also the Portuguese left. We decided to publish a slightly edited version adapted to the public.

Marcio Torres, originally published in Portuguese in September 2014



April 2013 street demo in Lisbon, against the “Troika” austerity demands for Portugal (photo: Dinheiro Vivo)

The Crisis

Portugal was one of the European countries that was most affected by the first years of the world’s capitalist crisis. At first, the Portuguese government, which is led by a coalition of the [bourgeois parties] PSD [Social Democratic Party] and CDS-PP [Popular Party] spent almost all of the country’s savings to bail out the big private banks, creating an enormous debt. The bourgeois state gave the money extracted mainly from the working class families to bank owners. Now, while the bourgeoisie is doing better, the workers are facing several attacks on their living standards, as the government tries to solve its debt by cutting the budget on public services like education and health care, laying-off public workers, changing the rules of Social Security to reduce payments and require more working time before retirement etc. All this is known as “austerity package” and is imposed by the so-called “Troika” (the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund). To sum-up, the Portuguese masses are going through the second stage of the capitalists’ plan to deal with the “socialization” of the crisis. Some big capitalists were saved by the state and then used this money to buy the assets of capitalists who weren’t bailed out and went bankrupt, increasing the concentration of capital that had led to the crisis in the first place.

One of the most serious consequences of the crisis on workers' lives is the insufficiency of their salary. With a 485 Euros national minimum wage (on which 15.2% of the population depend, according to a recent document from the Economy Ministry), the Portuguese have to face high prices for manufactured goods (most of them imported from large imperialist centers) and even food. In Lisbon, for example, it is hard to find a good meal for less than 5 Euros, which makes really prohibitive for the average worker to eat outside home, since in a month it would cost more than half the minimum wage (280 Euros). This obviously leads to an intensification of the domestic slavery which women are submitted to.

Other consequences of the crisis are easily noticeable by taking a look at any newspaper. With the beginning of the school year, the main topic on the news for the last weeks has been the crisis of the educational system. The September 9 issue of *Metro* announced a huge mass migration from private schools to the public ones, due the impossible situation faced by many parents and which makes it difficult to pay for the high tuition. Although the government officers claim the existence of a comfortable 10 students per teacher ratio in public schools, the national teacher's union claims that this is false data and that teachers in public schools are facing an overload of work (compared to the previous standards), aggravated by the fact that teachers have to do many bureaucratic tasks that take a great part of their time.

Obviously, the deterioration of working conditions is not affecting only teachers and education workers. To raise one more example, many private companies have been assigning young trainees to do the job of a regular worker – which is very profitable for the bosses, since the trainees' scholarships are paid by the State and that the former have not even the most basic labor rights. If they protest, they will obviously lose their jobs, which is a fearsome scenario for a youth which has been defining itself as the “*precariada*” [precarious]. This word became popular in the several struggles of the unemployed that sprouted during the last few years.

Another hot topic during the first weeks of September was the situation of the “New Bank”. It was created as a State-owned company after one of the biggest Portuguese financial groups, the “Grupo Espírito Santo”, and its bank went bankrupt and its main assets were bought by the State. After using public funds to save the owners of the Grupo Espírito Santo, the government is now talking about privatizing the New Bank. This means that, after the government spent a huge sum of money to clean up the mess of the profit-hunger CEO's and increased the public debt by doing so, the bank will be put again in the hands of those parasites – and will most probably be sold at a very a low price.

All these issues have been going on since 2009. The recent political upheavals that took place in Portugal as a protest to this situation, with massive street demos and several general strikes, still echoes in the streets of Lisbon. One can easily see stencils of radical slogans throughout the city, as well as big placards of different left groups, which call a lot of attention on the urban landscape.

The once Stalinist and now simply reformist Portuguese CP (PCP) recently ink-sprayed the entrance of the subway stations, demanding an “End with the massacre in Palestine”. Many of their placards can also be seen in different neighborhoods, announcing the big fest held in the beginning of the month by their publishing branch, *Avante*, which gathered many progressive artists. The much smaller Bloco de Esquerda [Left Bloc, BE] is an NPA-like multi-tendency party created in 1999 after the dissolution of USec's [United Secretariat of the Fourth International] Portuguese section. They periodically distribute their free bulletin at bus stops and subway stations. The recent issues of that bulletin are mainly dedicated to debating the ongoing effects of the austerity politics imposed by the EU, which were gladly accepted by conservative Portuguese parties. It is also easy to spot placards of the small Morenoite MAS [Socialist Alternative Movement, associated with late Nahuel Moreno], the Portuguese section of the [International Workers League] LIT-CI, which recently split from the Bloco de Esquerda. The posters by the MAS were mainly devoted to their candidate, who participated in the recent elections to the European Parliament, and whose main slogan was “No to the Euro”. Another group that had a variety of placards on the streets of Lisbon against the Euro and that were also announcing a “labor rally” which was held in mid-September was the Maoist PCTP [Portuguese Workers' Communist Party], which is famous for their elaborated paintings on street walls.

Despite the variety of left groups, the Socialist Party (PS) is the one which has grown the most due to the popular dissatisfaction with the austerity policies. It's easy to see Socialist MP's on TV news and taking part in debate shows confronting the PSD and CDS-PP Government Ministers with a somewhat radical rhetoric. This "radical" character, though, is indeed limited to their *speeches*. The PS is a party with a somewhat mass influence, but its program is thoroughly bourgeois. It is a tool to maintain the workers within the rotten boundaries of capitalism and prevent any working class alternative to the austerity package imposed by the EU.

The Left

It is noteworthy that among the mentioned left groups, none presents a revolutionary solution to the workers' problems. The PCP, although very big, is historically a class collaborationist group, responsible for several betrayals and which has presided over various provisional governments after the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship back in the 1970s. They had no problems in governing with the bourgeoisie. In their huge outdoors spread around Lisbon the CP proudly presents itself as a "patriotic" party as a way to profit from the dissatisfaction with the EU in the easiest possible way.

The Maoists, whose historical leader and founder left the group in the 1980s claiming that there was no more point for parties and unions and that the left was "pure shit" (but is still invited for the party's rallies and public activities), despite their supposed "revolutionary orthodoxy", claim the same rotten heritage of Stalinism, which should never be forgiven for betraying several revolutionary situations with their treacherous Popular Fronts. Following the Maoist guide book of class collaboration, the PCTP demands a "democratic and patriotic government" as a solution to the crisis, and raises the slogan for the "return of the Escudo" [Portugal's currency before Euro].

Apart from the CP, the Bloco de Esquerda is the group that draws more attention at the moment. But its politics are very moderate, specially now that some left-wing tendencies left the bloc: the Morenoite "Ruptura/FER", which formed the MAS, and the small "Socialismo Revolucionário", associated with [Peter Taaffe's] CWI. Now, the reformist majority is practically unopposed. This majority has its origins in the dissolution of the Mandelite PSR [Partido Socialista Revolucionário] in 1999, which created the BE [in a fusion with a then Maoist group and a group of former CP members]. The BE is hardly "Trotskyist" in any sense, not even in a purely formal one. Even the Mandelite grouping formally dissolved and those who want to be closely associated with the USec [in Portugal] have to apply for membership as individuals.

Although it has some union work and organizes some social sectors, the BE is too focused on electoral politics. On a June 2014 bulletin, a "Letter to the Left", signed by its two national coordinators, expressed a huge disappointment with the results obtained by the entire left on the recent European Elections, assigning to that process a disproportional weight if compared to the little importance the Portuguese masses gave to it, expressed in an abstention of around 60%. The BE's parliamentary cretinism is so deep that the bloc dropped historical demands of the radical left in order to gain "credibility". In its most recent bulletin (September/October 2014), instead of demanding the canceling of the Portuguese international debt, which is an instrument of dependence imposed by imperialist powers, the BE demands only an "immediate restructuring of the debt" (that is, to make sure Portugal pays only a "fair" tax to its international creditors). Also, in face of the low national minimum wage, instead of putting forward a struggle for a minimum wage sufficient to put-up with the needs of a working class family, with further increases according to the elevation of prices, the BE merely proposes a 60 Euros raise. Plus, in some of their placards spread around Lisbon, the BE demands "Down with the government – Respect the Constitution". One could ask if those who disrespect anti-labor and anti-protest laws should also be called upon to "respect" the bourgeois law in the Constitution.

Claiming to represent "a new left alternative" against the insufficiency of the other groups, the Morenoite MAS [Socialist Alternative Movement] split from the BE in 2012. But there's nothing "new" about it, since before joining the BE as the "Ruptura/FER" tendency, they already existed since the middle 1970s as the PRT [Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores], which participated in the CIA-backed demos led by the PS

[Socialist Party] against the PCP/MFA provisional governments – a position which they rapidly swapped for a characterization of the MFA as a proto-soviet formation and of the government as “Kerenskyite” (according to Moreno’s revisionist “democratic revolution” terminology) [see *Moreno’s Left Face*, written by the then revolutionary Spartacist League and republished in [Moreno’s Truth Kit](#)]. Also, the [immediate reason for the] Morenoites’ split from the BE was *from the right*, confirming that they indeed have nothing new to offer. Instead of being a left-wing split away from the BE’s parliamentary cretinism, the reason for the 2012 split was that the Morenoites opposed the BE being against entering a government with the reformist and proudly “patriotic” PCP! [See the 2012 [statement by the MAS Executive Committee](#)]. What can we say of these “Trotskyists” who propose electoral lash-ups with the formerly Stalinist reformists [to run the bourgeois state]!? According to the tiny CWI group in Portugal, the MAS recent campaign in the European Elections was entirely centered around the slogans “No to the Euro”, “Jail those who ruined the country”, “End the politicians’ privileges” and “600 Euro national minimum wage now”, without even a mention to the necessity of a revolution to smash capitalism – an absence which is reflected in their street placards [[see the CWI polemic](#)].

Something worth mentioning is the absence of powerful youth struggles among the Portuguese left – with the important exception of the city of Coimbra, whose life is closely linked to the Coimbra University and, therefore, has a somewhat strong youth militancy engaged in students issues. That is comprehensible since in 2013 the National Ethics Council for the Sciences of Life stated that Portugal is the 6th country with the eldest population in the world, 42 being the average age of one of its citizens. Since the 2008 crisis, many young people have left the country in search for better job opportunities. Militancy and radicalization in the left are generally associated with an important element of youth among its ranks – so much that Lenin once jokily said that “every revolutionary should be shot after passing the age of 35”. Therefore, this is certainly a factor (among others) behind the lack of radicalization in the Portuguese left that we referred to.

Despite the deep crisis that the country is going through, the political situation is not as intense as it should be in terms of militancy and struggles, since the mass protests and strikes seem to have wavered. The crisis of revolutionary leadership certainly plays a role in it, since no group on the left was able to build a revolutionary movement against the effects of the economic crisis. This situation, on its turn, reinforces the workers’ lack of trust on ostensibly socialist organizations.

To end this short report with an anecdote, in the morning of September 11th the subway workers held a 1-day strike. Around 4 thousand workers (according to the *Diário Nacional*) marched to the Republic Assembly (the Portuguese Congress) demanding a 3% salary raise, but many others simply gathered in front of the closed stations, waiting until 11am, when the subway employees promised to reopen, allowing the normal routine to be carried-on. At the night of the same day, an enormous crowd gathered at the historical center of Lisbon for the 5th edition of “Vogue’s Fashion Night Out”, an event to stimulate shopping at street stores – a luxury that fewer and fewer Portuguese workers can afford. This absurdly contradictory scene only reinforces the urgent need of a struggle to build a revolutionary party capable of defeating the Troika’s austerity “solution” and putting forward a revolutionary perspective to the crisis of capitalism.



Left groups’ placards on a Lisbon square. From left to right: “DOWN WITH THE EURO! Down with the Coelho/Portas national-betrayal government! Back with the Escudo! Hail the democratic and patriotic unity government!” (PCTP); “Jobs, rights, sovereignty. For left wing and patriotic politics! The people’s strength for a Portugal with future.” (PCP); “Save the education and defend the health care – tax the fortunes” (Bloco de Esquerda).